GCC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS
CONFERENCE REPORT

GCC Qualifications Going Global
Towards Internationally Recognised Qualifications Frameworks in the GCC Countries

Qualifications Framework Project
19 May 2009
THE GCC QUALIFICATIONS GOING GLOBAL
Towards Internationally Recognised Qualifications Frameworks in the GCC Countries

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19 May 2009
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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADEC</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi Education Council</td>
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<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>CBT</td>
<td>Competency-Based Training</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Council</td>
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<td>EQF</td>
<td>European Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>ETF</td>
<td>European Training Foundation</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
<td>Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
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<td>GCCQF</td>
<td>GCC Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>GE</td>
<td>General Education</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
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<td>MQA</td>
<td>Malaysian Qualifications Authority</td>
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<td>MQF</td>
<td>Malaysian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>NCHRD</td>
<td>National Centre for Human Resource Development</td>
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<td>NQA</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority</td>
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<td>NQAI</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</td>
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<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>NQS</td>
<td>National Qualifications System</td>
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<td>OBE</td>
<td>Outcomes-Based Education</td>
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<td>QF</td>
<td>Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>QFP</td>
<td>Qualifications Framework Project</td>
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<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>RQF</td>
<td>Regional Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Corporation</td>
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<td>SAQA</td>
<td>South African Qualifications Authority</td>
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<td>SCQF</td>
<td>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)</td>
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<td>TQF</td>
<td>Transnational Qualifications Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>TVQF</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>VTC</td>
<td>Vocational Training Centre</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Attempts to establish a framework of qualifications in Arab States can be traced back to a treaty signed in Paris on the 22nd of December 1978. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meta-framework is therefore being viewed by many as a potential tool for achieving most of the resolutions of this Treaty. The GCC General Secretariat considered a GCC conference to be an ideal platform to discuss all the issues arising that make it timely to have a debate about the possibilities for developing a GCC meta-framework. At the behest of the GCC General Secretariat, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Qualifications Framework Project organized the first GCC Qualifications Framework Conference in Abu Dhabi on the 5th and 6th of April 2009, 31 years after the Treaty, entitled “GCC Qualifications Going Global”.

The outcomes that were expected from the conference included GCC delegates:

1. being convinced about the value of national qualifications frameworks and the need for them in GCC countries and also being able to appreciate the usefulness of national qualifications frameworks in terms of
   - establishing, organising and clarifying national qualifications systems,
   - interpreting foreign qualifications, and
   - enabling alignments with other national or regional frameworks.

2. reaching conclusions and make recommendations about:
   - establishing national qualifications frameworks within each GCC country,
   - establishing a meta-framework for the alignment of national qualifications systems in the GCC, and
   - the need for alignment and mapping of the GCC meta-framework to European Qualifications Framework and other meta-frameworks.

The organization of the first GCC Conference was designed to foster a genuine dialogue among the participants and to provide an opportunity for decision-makers in the UAE and the other member
countries of the GCC to gain insight into these concepts and to consider the issues and challenges that may arise in introducing national qualifications frameworks, and developing a regional meta-framework for the GCC countries.

Consequently, it was decided that the 2 day proceedings would take place as follows:

- an introductory session followed by 3 plenary sessions covering an overview of international developments, briefing on the situation in individual GCC countries and progress made in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries with respect to qualifications frameworks, and a summing-up session on the first day
- two consecutive workshops on the second day in the form of panel discussions, focused on the role of qualifications frameworks in bridging the divide between general, vocational and higher education sectors; and qualifications frameworks as a benefit to learners and as a labour market tool, followed by a plenary summing-up meeting

103 delegates from over 20 countries including GCC attended. Keynote speakers and workshop panel members included representatives from European Training Foundation; Council of Europe; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; Qualifications Authorities and Quality Assurance Boards from Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Malaysia, European Union, Jordan, Morocco and Canada, and representatives from Higher Education Ministries, Councils, Universities and Vocational Education and Training Providers from the UAE and GCC. Participants in the workshops included senior civil servants, educators, researchers, experts and representatives of industry, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.

The conference was officially opened by Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al-Khaili, the Director General of the Abu Dhabi Education Council who, amongst other things, remarked that the much needed integration between the education and training systems cannot be achieved without the establishment of a qualifications system based on the recognition of learning outcomes for all individuals in society.

Engineer Faisal Albakeri, the Director of the Qualifications Framework Project provided the background to the conference. In his remarks, he indicated that the GCC states have the responsibility to identify the best international practices to develop their education and training systems and to devise the most suitable solutions to link the learning outcomes obtained during the individual’s life and the labour market, in particular, and the needs of the society, in general.

1.2. OVERVIEW OF RELATED INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

There are two views of qualifications: traditional and new. In the traditional view, qualifications are viewed as something to do with degrees, diplomas, the education system and degree system. In the new view that started from the 1990s, qualifications are viewed as something to do with a
qualifications framework. The pioneers of the national qualifications frameworks are South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Regional and transnational qualifications frameworks are also starting to emerge across the globe. Europe has already established two regional qualifications frameworks and The Commonwealth is establishing a transnational qualifications framework.

At the national level, in Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was created and named in 2001 by five key partners called the 'SCQF Partnership' and it is an integrated national qualifications framework. In Malaysia, the Malaysian Qualifications Framework was developed in 2003 by the Quality Assurance Division in the Ministry of Higher Education as a response to the need to rationalize equivalency of qualifications acquired via the cross-border, distance, contact and home learning situations. The national framework of qualifications in Ireland was established in 2001 as a response to the existence of a variety of structures and agencies issuing qualifications, a diversity of systems and subsystems, separate organizational sectors, and different systems of recognition of prior learning. And in South Africa, the national qualifications framework was established in 1995 as a response to the increased emphasis on a skilled flexible labour force, expectations of greater integration of education and training, prioritization of a move away from the apartheid legislation, and use of an outcomes-based education approach influenced by competency-based training.

At the regional level, in Europe, a political consensus was reached in 2004 for the development of an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). On April 23, 2008 the European Parliament made a recommendation to its member states to align their national qualifications frameworks with the European Qualifications Framework. This is a voluntary initiative but there is a very strong collective will among the European countries to implement EQF.

1.3. OVERVIEW OF RELATED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The exploration of the use of national qualifications frameworks as a possible reform tool in the MENA region started in 2005 with 10 countries. However, the focus was more particularly on Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco.

The moves to develop a national qualifications framework in Jordan began in 2006 when a technical team representing technical and vocational education and training providers and private sector began meeting regularly. The technical team has developed a provisional national qualifications framework with 7 levels and 3 broad descriptors. It is a series of reference levels describing types of knowledge, skills and competence contained in various qualifications.

Currently countries are now at different stages and there is a stocktaking conference in Tunisia at the end of the year.
1.4. OVERVIEW OF RELATED SUB-REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

The developments in Oman are currently focusing on the technical and vocational education and training sector. Attempts are being made to integrate vocational training centres with colleges of technology.

Saudi Arabia has developed and implemented what it calls the ‘technical and vocational qualifications framework’. Its purpose is to create access, transfer and flexibility between different training routes; organize professional work practices; and facilitate implementation of professional inspection. It has five levels. Each level has six standard domains: knowledge, skills, achievement, leadership, communication skills and responsibility.

The UAE has developed an integrated national qualifications framework. It is a 10-level framework based on learning outcomes. Each level has a generic level descriptor. And each descriptor has the following five strands each made up of generic statements of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility, self-development, and role in context.

1.5. THE ROLE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN VET AND HE

With the growing importance of adult learning the boundaries between higher and vocational education are weakening. Qualifications frameworks are an excellent and necessary beginning to bridge the divide amongst the general, vocational and higher education sectors. Qualifications frameworks will assist to identify gaps in both the vocational and higher education qualifications.

1.6. QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AS BENEFIT TO LEARNERS AND EMPLOYERS

Implementation of qualifications frameworks has a number of benefits for both learners and employers. For learners, amongst other things, qualifications frameworks help to signpost progression routes, give recognition for all types of learning, and help to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning. For employers, qualifications frameworks help widen scope for recruitment, help avoid costly training mistakes, and help identify opportunities for workforce development.
1.7. CHALLENGES

There are several key challenges faced by qualifications frameworks, at both the policy and practical levels and in the development and implementation phases. These include a lack of intellectual engagement in qualifications framework’s discourse, conceptual confusions and contestations over competences and outcomes, and lack of clarity of the purposes of the national qualifications frameworks.

1.8. RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations also came up from the conference presentations and discussions. These include the need for a strong experimental scientific approach to the development, implementation and evaluation of a national qualifications framework; the need for guidance and counselling across the system; and the importance of a coherent and systemic implementation.

1.9. CONCLUSION

In the GCC, no country has implemented a national qualifications framework even though there are some sectoral (vocational in particular) qualifications frameworks implemented. To realise the dream of the Treaty of 1978 for Arab Countries, national qualifications frameworks are stepping stones towards that dream. There is therefore a need for more work towards the establishment of qualifications frameworks as a common language in the region.
2. INTRODUCTION

Attempts to establish a framework of qualifications in Arab States can be traced back to a treaty signed in Paris on the 22nd of December 1978. In this Treaty, titled “Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States”, 22 Arab States including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman and the State of Qatar, commonly referred to as the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, “resolved (underline is original) to organize their co-operation and strengthen it in respect of recognition1 of studies, diplomas and degrees of higher education by means of a convention which would be the starting point for concerted, dynamic action carried out, in particular, through national, bilateral, subregional and regional bodies set up for that purpose” (p.1).

In the Treaty, the Contracting States solemnly declare their firm resolve to co-operate closely with a view to enabling the educational resources available to them to be used as effectively as possible in the interests of all the Contracting States, and, for this purpose:

i. To adopt terminology and evaluation criteria as similar as possible, especially as regards the harmonization of the names of diplomas and degrees and of stages of study, in order to simplify the application of a system which will ensure the comparability of credits, subjects of study and diplomas;

ii. To improve the system for the exchange of information regarding the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees;

iii. To co-ordinate the entrance requirements of the educational institutions of each country;

iv. To adopt a dynamic approach in matters of admission to further stages of study, bearing in mind not only knowledge acquired, as attested by diplomas and degrees, but also the individual’s experience and achievements, so far as these may be deemed acceptable by the competent authorities;

v. To make their higher educational institutions as widely accessible as possible to students from any of the Contracting States;

1 All the words in italics indicate emphasis by the authors.
vi. To recognize the studies, diplomas and degrees of such persons, and to encourage exchanges and the greatest possible freedom of movement of teachers, students and research workers in the region; and

vii. To alleviate the difficulties encountered by those returning home after completing their education abroad, so that their reintegration into the life of the country may be achieved in the manner most beneficial both to the community and to the development of their own personality (Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States, 1978, p. 4).

The GCC meta-framework therefore is being viewed by many as a potential tool for achieving most of the resolutions of this Treaty. If put in place, it will introduce terminology and evaluation criteria as similar as possible amongst the GCC countries, enable comparability of credits for each level of the framework, exchange information through establishment of a register of all recognized qualifications and what the Treaty calls “partial studies” which could be interpreted as component or specific-profile/specific-purpose qualifications, recognise not only knowledge but also skills and competencies of learners, make learning in informal education accessible through tools such as recognition of prior learning, make movement across countries much easier due to easy referencing of qualifications, and of course alleviate the problem of integrating returning students since it will also be referenced to other meta-frameworks such as the European Qualifications Framework, the Southern African Development Corporation Framework, and the Caribbean Community Framework.

Hence, the first Gulf Qualifications Conference entitled “GCC Qualifications Going Global” was organized by the Qualifications Framework Project in Abu Dhabi at the behest of the GCC General Secretariat on the 5th and 6th of April 2009, 31 years after the Treaty, as an adjunct to the 2nd GCC meeting of the Joint Group for developing GCC national qualifications frameworks under the auspices of Abu Dhabi Education Council.

The outcomes that were expected from the conference included GCC delegates:

1. being convinced about the value of national qualifications frameworks and the need for them in GCC countries and also being able to appreciate the usefulness of national qualifications frameworks in terms of:
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The organization of the first GCC Conference was designed to foster a genuine dialogue among the participants and to provide an opportunity for decision-makers in the UAE and the other member countries of the GCC to gain insight into these concepts and to consider the issues and challenges that may arise in introducing national qualifications frameworks, and developing a regional meta-framework for the GCC Countries.

Consequently, it was decided that the 2 day proceedings would take place as follows:

1. an introductory session followed by 3 plenary sessions covering an overview of international developments, briefing on the situation in individual GCC countries and progress made in the MENA countries with respect to national qualifications frameworks, and a summing-up session on the first day

2. two consecutive workshops on the second day in the form of panel discussions, focused on the role of qualifications frameworks in bridging the divide between general, vocational and higher sectors, and qualifications frameworks as a benefit to learners and as a labour market tool, followed by a plenary summing-up meeting.

103 delegates from over 20 countries including all the six GCC countries attended. Keynote speakers and workshop panel members included representatives from European Training Foundation; Council of Europe; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Qualifications Authorities and Quality Assurance Boards from Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Malaysia, EU, Jordan, Morocco and Canada, and representatives from Higher Education Ministries, Councils, Universities and Vocational Education and Training Providers from the UAE and GCC. Participants in the workshops included senior civil servants, educators, researchers, experts and representatives of industry, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.
3. OPENING ADDRESS AND BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE

3.1. OPENING ADDRESS
(Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al-Khaili; Director General; Abu Dhabi Education Council)

The conference was officially opened by Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al-Khaili, Director General of the Abu Dhabi Education Council. In his official opening speech he said that well-educated and trained people were the true assets of any nation’s development; hence, the quality of education had become not only a necessity but rather an obligation, should the nation seek competitiveness in the world market. He added that:

This much needed integration between the education and training systems cannot be achieved without the establishment of a qualifications system based on the recognition of learning outcomes for all individuals of the society. The huge investment on education and training will neither, otherwise, turn out any of the tangible results needed by the society and individuals nor bring about the requirements for social and economic development.

Dr. Al Khaili went on to say that the UAE, under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, President of the UAE and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, and Chairman of ADEC, had always sought to beget the best practices in the fields of education and training so as to qualify UAE human resources to ably meet the needs of the labor market and the economic and social development.

3.2. BACKGROUND TO THE CONFERENCE
(Eng. Faisal Albakeri; Director; Qualifications Framework Project)

Engineer Faisal Albakeri, the Director of the Qualifications Framework Project, provided the background to the conference. He said that the GCC states have the responsibility to identify the
best international practices to develop their education and training systems and to devise the most suitable solutions to link the learning outcomes obtained during the individual’s life and the labor market, in particular, and the needs of the society, in general. This, he added, “is the core of the concept of knowledge-based economy which connects the individual’s knowledge with all its financial and moral assets to the needs of the local, regional, and international markets”.

Mr. Albakeri also said that the UAE Qualifications Framework Project, with the support of many relevant bodies in the UAE, thoroughly studied the experiences of many European and Asian countries that had already developed their national or meta-qualifications frameworks, and the role such frameworks play to achieve recognition at the regional and international levels. It is therefore necessary that:

Our conference addresses the important developments the world is currently observing in the field of qualifications systems and their implementation in different areas of the world.

The way by which two meta-frameworks were developed, namely, the EQF Meta-Framework in Europe and the Southern African Development Corporation Meta-Framework, and their contribution to establishing European recognition of the qualifications of the countries that come under their umbrella, are further points to take in hand, Mr. Albakeri stated.

4. OVERVIEW OF RELATED INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

(Sjur Bergan; Head of the Department of Higher Education and History Teaching; Council of Europe and Chair of Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks)

There are two views of qualifications: traditional and new. In the traditional view, represented in the Council of Europe or United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Recognition Convention of 1997, qualifications are viewed as something to do with degrees, diplomas, education system and degree system. In the new view that started from the 1990s, qualifications are viewed as something to do with a qualifications framework.
The pioneers of the national qualifications frameworks are South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The first national qualifications frameworks in Europe were implemented in Ireland, United Kingdom/Scotland and United Kingdom. These are normally referred to as the first generation national qualifications frameworks. There is now a rapid growth of national qualifications frameworks in Europe and Asia. In Canada the rapid growth is provincial rather than national. By now, a qualifications framework is a well-established concept. More than 100 countries worldwide are either developing or implementing qualifications frameworks.

Regional and transnational qualifications frameworks are also starting to emerge across the globe. Europe has already established two regional qualifications frameworks and The Commonwealth is establishing a transnational qualifications framework. The two regional qualifications frameworks, the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (commonly referred to as the Bologna Framework) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (commonly referred to as EQF), were established in 2005 and 2008 respectively. Efforts are underway in the Southern African Development Corporation, ASEAN Regional Caucus of Quality Assurance Agencies in South East Asia, Oceania, Caribbean Community, and now recently Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, to develop regional qualifications frameworks. A transnational qualifications framework has been proposed for the small countries of the commonwealth in 2008.

4.2. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

4.2.1. DEVELOPMENTS IN SCOTLAND

(Aileen Ponton; CEO; Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework - SCQF)

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework was created and named in 2001 by 5 key partners called the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership. It is an integrated national qualifications framework and has two aims:

1. To assist people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential.

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2 The distinction amongst qualifications frameworks in terms of scope or coverage should always be kept in mind. Some are sectoral (either economic or education sector), some are national and still some are becoming regional and transnational.

3 The Bologna Framework focuses on higher education sector, has 3 plus one intermediate levels, agreed upon by 46 countries, by 2010 all the 42 countries should have implemented it, and uses country self-certification. The European Qualifications Framework focuses on all levels of education, has 8 levels, agreed upon by 32 countries, by 2010 and 2012 it should have been implemented, and uses referencing of national qualifications.

4 A concept document has been developed in 2005 and comparative analysis of qualifications in the region has just started this year.
2. To enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

In 2006, a company was created to oversee the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The key responsibilities of this company are:

1. to maintain quality and integrity of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework,
2. develop Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework as a lifelong learning tool, and
3. develop relationships with other national qualifications frameworks.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is outcomes-based. It recognizes units, courses and programs of learning that lead into qualifications. Qualifications are classified according to level descriptors found in each of the 12 levels of the framework. Each credit assigned to a unit equates to 10 notional learning hours.

To date, there are several benefits and added value for stakeholders in Scotland arising out of the introduction of SCQF. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is:

- helping learners signpost their progression routes,
- helping learners quantify amount of learning achieved,
- giving recognition for all types of learning,
- creating a national language of qualifications, and
- providing parity of esteem.

4.2.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN MALAYSIA
(Balakrishnan Vassu; Director; Quality Assurance Coordination Division; Malaysian Qualifications Authority)

The Malaysian Qualifications Framework was developed in 2003 by the Quality Assurance Division in the Ministry of Higher Education. It came as a response to the need to rationalize equivalency of qualifications acquired via the cross-border, distance, contact and home learning situations.

It is a national vocational qualifications framework and aims to promote understanding of qualifications and gain public confidence in the Malaysian qualifications. It classifies qualifications, learning outcomes and credits based on academic level load into 8 academic levels.

Since its inception, the Malaysian Qualifications Framework has benefitted learners in terms of access. It provides access to higher education for persons who were previously denied access to tertiary qualifications through the use of Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning. However access via Recognition of Prior Learning is limited to the Open Universities in Malaysia and accounts for 10 – 20%.
4.2.3. DEVELOPMENTS IN IRELAND  
(Claire Byrne; Director; Corporate Affairs and Communications; National Qualifications Authority of Ireland)

The national framework of qualifications in Ireland was established in 2001. It was a response to the existence of a variety of structures and agencies issuing qualifications, a diversity of systems and subsystems, separate organizational sectors, and different systems of recognition of prior learning. The national framework of qualifications was introduced as a policy to provide for a coherent national policy approach to qualifications, establish a more flexible system of qualifications, to make qualifications portable, and to compare and align with international developments.

The Irish national framework of qualifications includes qualifications achieved in the schools and in further and higher education and training. It has 10 levels. Each level is based on a range of standards of knowledge, skills and competencies. New qualifications are placed and legacy qualifications are aligned to the framework. Qualifications are divided into four classes: major, minor, supplemental and special-purpose qualifications. There are 16 major qualifications types including Level Certificate, Junior Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Ordinary Bachelor Degree, Honours Bachelor Degree, Masters Degree and Doctoral Degree.

4.2.4. DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA  
(Samuel Isaacs: CEO; South African Qualifications Authority)

The national qualifications framework was established in 1995 as a response to the increased emphasis on a skilled flexible labour force, expectations of greater integration of education and training, prioritization of a move away from the apartheid legislation, and use of an outcomes-based education approach influenced by competency-based training. Its objectives are integration, access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development.

The newly legislated national qualifications framework has 10 levels and is still based on learning outcomes. However, it is has encountered problems since its implementation signified by the changes been made. These problems centred around standardisation versus differentiation, up-front design-down prescriptive approach versus up-front bottom-up descriptive incremental approach, 8 versus 10 levels, 2 versus 3 quality councils, a distinction between competency standards (linked to job descriptions) and academic standards (that relate to domains of knowledge); lack of inclusion of occupational qualifications with distinct knowledge and theory, practical skills and work experience components; and shift from non-research to research-driven policy.
4.3. META FRAMEWORKS OF QUALIFICATIONS

4.3.1. DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

(Carlo Scatoli; European Qualifications Framework Coordinator; European Commission)

In Europe there is a shared perception of the need to make qualifications more transparent and readable. A political consensus was reached in 2004 for “the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, which will stand as a common reference covering both VET and higher education, based mainly on competencies and learning outcomes” (p.1).

In April 23, 2008 the European Parliament made a recommendation for the use of the European Qualifications Framework. It is a voluntary initiative. Its purpose is to connect and not to merge or reform the national qualifications systems of member countries.

European Qualifications Framework is an overarching framework of 8 levels covering the general, vocational and higher education sectors. It is defined through non-subject specific descriptors in terms of learning outcomes organized around knowledge, skills and competencies. It is about the relative position of qualifications throughout Europe.

Once fully functioning, it is hoped that the European Qualifications Framework will:

- provide a way to compare qualifications in Europe,
- ensure an integrated reference system for the European lifelong learning area,
- provide a comprehensive profile of competences acquired throughout Europe,
- allow bridges between education and training throughout Europe, and
- help learners, employers, and institutions to make informed choices throughout Europe.

By 2010 all member states are expected to have related their national qualifications frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework, and to ensure that by 2010 the qualifications issued by competent authorities are related via the national qualifications system to the European Qualifications Framework.
5. OVERVIEW OF RELATED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS (GCC COUNTRIES)

5.1. DEVELOPMENTS IN KUWAIT

The focus in Kuwait has been on vocational occupations. The qualifications framework came as a response to the problem of issuing labour permits to a number of expatriates who bring along qualifications from their home countries that need to be recognised. It started as an initiative by the Ministry of Social Affairs and later included the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Up to now 123 occupations have been developed and 60 assessments completed. This work is expected to finish in the next three months.

5.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN OMAN

(Dr. Abdul Karim)

The developments in Oman are currently focusing on the technical and vocational education and training sector. Attempts are made to integrate vocational training centres with colleges of technology. This is to provide:

- open paths between the vocational training and technical education,
- to encourage students to join technical and vocational education and training at their capacity at various levels,
- to build positive image of technical and vocational education and training,
- to reflect requirements of employers in terms of knowledge and skills at various levels, and
- to provide flexibility for individuals to enter and exit the system at various levels.

The next step is to develop a national qualifications framework, credit transfer and accumulation system for the vocational and higher education sectors, and the GCC Meta-Framework.
5.3. DEVELOPMENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA  
(Dr. Saad M. Al-Shayed)

Saudi Arabia has developed and implemented a technical and vocational qualifications framework. Its purpose is to create access, transfer and flexibility between different training routes; organize professional work practices; and facilitate implementation of professional inspection.

The framework has five levels. Level 1 is semi-skilled and awards a vocational training certificate. Level 2 is skilled and also awards a vocational training certificate. Level 3 is technician and still awards a vocational training certificate. Level 4 is advanced and awards an associate degree. And level 5 is a specialist and awards a university degree. Each level has six standard domains: knowledge, skills, achievement, leadership, communication skills and responsibility. Qualification levels have been developed to categorize jobs within each specialization according to these domains.

There are challenges to implementing this framework. Professional work is not appreciated, professional work levels’ requirements are not clear and there is a continuous change of work sectors when gains are not clear.

The next step is to develop a national qualifications framework and work towards a GCC Meta-Framework.

5.4. DEVELOPMENTS IN BAHRAIN

Bahrain has established quality councils for several industrial sectors including tourism and information technology. It is borrowing from the Scottish system of national qualifications framework. The challenge is how to involve stakeholders both from the public and private sectors.

5.5. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES  
(Eng. Faisal Albakeri; QFP)

The UAE has developed an integrated national qualifications framework. The integrated national qualifications framework will form a basis for a coherent national policy approach, a benchmark for accurate interpretation of foreign qualifications, and a link between the “world of education and training” and the “world of work”.

The integrated national qualifications framework will be a frame of reference for existing qualifications, a basis for the design of new qualifications, an aid in the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, and an aid in the recognition of foreign qualifications. It is a 10-level
framework based on learning outcomes. Each level has a generic level descriptor. And each descriptor has five strands each made up of generic statements of learning outcomes.

Currently, the developments are underway to establish an Authority that will oversee the further developments, implementation and evaluation of the impact of the national qualifications framework in the UAE. The UAE is also spearheading developments to establish the GCC Meta-Framework.

The challenge is whether each GCC country should develop its own national qualifications framework first before any attempts to establish a GCC Meta-Framework, or, whether a GCC Meta-Framework should be developed first and each GCC countries use it as their point of reference.

5.6. REMARKS

- GCC countries have different education and training systems. The general education system is almost similar across GCC countries. However, vocational and higher education systems are different.

- There are different approaches to occupational standards. There is a need to find a way to translate jobs and occupations from one country to the other.

- The link in the GCC countries is not the size of the country but similar political systems. There is therefore a need to work together for one GCC framework rather than separate national qualifications frameworks.

- There is a need to differentiate between skilled-based training and competence-based training.

- The GCC needs an objective quantitative rather than qualitative subjective approach to assess portfolios of people at different levels.
6. OVERVIEW OF RELATED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS (MENA COUNTRIES)

6.1. INTRODUCTION

(Arjen Deij; Senior Specialist - Qualifications Frameworks; European Training Foundation)

The exploration of the use of national qualifications frameworks as a possible reform tool in the MENA region started in 2005 with 10 countries. However, the focus was more particularly on Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. The starting point was the national reforms. It was not about establishing national qualifications frameworks but about researching and facilitating vocational education and training reform policy and clarifying the implications of national qualifications frameworks.

The research had several findings. Amongst these it was found that there is a need for frameworks rather than a focus on single qualifications; there is a need to balance outcomes, processes and inputs; there is a need to take account of the international perspective of the national qualifications and frameworks.

The findings led to three levels of intervention. At level one, national action plans and strategies for national qualifications frameworks. At level two there was peer learning at regional level through peer reviews. And at level three there were Europe-Mediterranean level technical support and study visits.

Currently countries are now at different stages and there is a stocktaking conference in Tunisia at the end of the year.

6.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN MOROCCO

(Mohammed Slaihi; Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training)

Attempts to establish a qualifications framework in Morocco started in 2000. There are several purposes identified for the qualifications framework in Morocco including transferability, transparency, accreditation, pathways, life-long-learning, benchmarking and recognition of qualifications. Morocco has been working closely with the European Union, United Kingdom,
Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Tunisia. It is 8-level qualifications framework and it aligns level of training and economic activities.

The main challenge for the implementation of the qualifications framework in Morocco comes from the higher education sector. There is resistance from higher education and economic stakeholders.

6.3. DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN
(Nader Mryyan; National Centre for Human Resource Development)

The moves to develop a national qualifications framework in Jordan began in 2006 when a technical team representing technical and vocational education and training providers and the private sector began meeting regularly. The team started with the technical and vocational education and training sector and used the tourism trade as a pilot. The national qualifications framework came as a response to, amongst other challenges, qualifications being too rigid, too much input-based with insufficient attention to learning outcomes and labour market needs, supply-driven and lacking international recognition.

The technical team has developed a provisional national qualifications framework with 7 levels and 3 broad descriptors. It is a series of reference levels describing types of knowledge, skills and competence contained in various qualifications. Typical qualifications in Level 1 include Entry or Basic qualifications, in Level 2 Applied Vocational and Lower Secondary, in Level 3 Upper Secondary or General and Vocational, in Level 4 Post Secondary or Non University Diploma, Level 5 University Degree or Equivalent Professional Qualification, Level 6 Masters’ Degree or Equivalent Professional Qualification, and Level 7 Doctorate Degree or Equivalent Professional Qualification.

For the implementation, it is recommended that the national qualifications framework be linked with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Council and not with any single Ministry.
7. SUMMARY OF DAY ONE DISCUSSIONS
(Dr. Don Baker; Dean; College of Humanities & Social Sciences; UAE University)

Dr. Baker summarised the days’ presentations and discussions and presented the key issues as follows:

- To be effective, qualifications frameworks should be rooted within government policies,
- Quality assurance is a vital part of qualifications frameworks,
- It is important to involve stakeholders in the implementation of qualifications frameworks,
- Qualifications frameworks have a number of advantages including introducing a national common language of qualifications, a system to compare qualifications, facilitate life-long learning, and help institutions to market their programs nationally and internationally,
- Some of the challenges qualifications frameworks face include fitting legacy qualifications into national qualifications frameworks, and properly conceptualising the shape of governing structures (e.g., Ireland is moving towards integrating awarding bodies with the Authority whilst South Africa is breaking the Authority to have separate awarding bodies),
- A word of caution is that the nature of qualifications frameworks needs to be clearly understood by the qualifications frameworks developers, and qualifications frameworks should be seen as a starting point for dialogues than imposition on institutions,
- The presentations from MENA and GCC countries indicate the great extent to which there is an understanding of qualifications frameworks in this region, and
- In conclusion, (i) the proposed qualifications framework for the UAE is state of the art and reflect best practice in the world and it is a good starting point for the GCC, (ii) Qualifications frameworks are not ready made solutions but a tool that serves as a starting point, (iii) Qualifications frameworks are based on learning outcomes, but learning outcomes themselves are based on inputs and processes. These must also be taking into consideration, (iv) one of the key priorities of qualifications frameworks’ developers in this region should be to thoroughly teach institutions about qualifications frameworks and the dialogue should not only be dominated by training and vocation only but should also include discussions about academic education and universities. It should be remembered that qualifications frameworks are not only about narrow specific job training but also about protecting consumers of training programs.
8. THE ROLE OF QFS IN BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN HE AND VET

With the growing importance of adult learning the boundaries between higher and vocational education are weakening. The question is “at what points in the framework should it be possible to move between higher and vocational education?” This question was addressed in the first workshop in day two of the conference.

The workshop was chaired by Claire Byrne, the Director of Corporate Affairs and Communications of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. Speakers were:

- **Arjen Deij**, Senior Specialist-Qualifications Framework, European Training Foundation, ETF
- **Sjur Bergan**, Head of the Department of Higher Education and History Teaching, Council of Europe Chair of the Bologna Coordination Group on Qualifications Frameworks, EU
- **Prof. Jim Mienczakowski**, Head of Higher Education, Abu Dhabi Education Council, ADEC
- **Prof. Ian Cumbus**, Commissioner, Commission for Academic Accreditation, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, MOHESR

All speakers emphasised that qualifications frameworks are an excellent and necessary beginning to bridge the divide amongst the general, vocational and higher education sectors. Aside from the confidence of employer groups, qualifications frameworks approaches must gain authority in their capacities to determine not only the status and value of training and industrial skills but the pertinence of academic qualification comparisons.

A qualification framework will assist in identifying gaps in both higher and vocational education qualifications. For example, University Bachelor’s Degrees are likely to have much emphasis on knowledge and cognitive skills but less practical skills and competences. These gaps could be filled by adding some vocational education and training units to qualifications. Similarly, someone from vocational education and training might need to do some units of knowledge and cognitive skills to fill these gaps before gaining access to higher education. The volume of learning (credits) and complexity of work (framework levels) required will determine placements of a learner into each sector for progression and articulation.
9. QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AS A BENEFIT TO LEARNERS AND EMPLOYERS

The second workshop discussed the benefits of qualifications frameworks to both learners and employers. It was chaired by Samuel Isaacs, the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Speakers were:

- **Aileen Ponton**, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, SCQF
- **Dr. Naji Al-Ali**, Director of the National Institute for Vocational Education, NIVE Dubai’s Knowledge and Human Development Authority, KHDA
- **Dr. Madhu Singh**, Coordinator of Lifelong Learning Programme, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, UNESCO
- **Edwin Mernagh**, Consultant, Qualifications Framework Project, QFP

Speakers identified several benefits qualifications frameworks create for both learners and employers. Learners in vocational education and training are concerned about employability, accreditation of their learning programs, recognition of their qualifications, progression for their careers, and status of vocational education and training qualifications and institutions. How can the qualifications framework assist to settle these concerns?

For learners, qualifications frameworks:

- help to signpost progression routes,
- help quantify amount of learning achieved,
- give recognition for all types of learning,
- widen opportunities including recognition of prior learning from informal settings and recognition of equivalent learning from non-formal programs,
- help to avoid unnecessary repetition of learning,
- give assurance that the study programs are linked to a specific qualification level,
- allow learners to recognize the particular types of jobs that will be open to them upon graduation,
- have the capacity to supply graduates with courses that are in demand in the economy and industry,
- create pathways between different education and training subsectors,
- ensure transitions for ever growing number of early school leavers, and
- ensure that certificates convey clearly defined information on competences
In one testimony, one learner in Scotland said: “I went straight in at final year which was fantastic – I just couldn’t have done another three years’ full-time study on top of the two years to get the HND” (from the presentation by Ponton).

On the other hand, employers are concerned with performance, competitiveness, profit, stability and competent and committed workforce. For employers, qualifications frameworks:

- help widen scope for recruitment by, amongst other things, collaborating with institutions using a qualifications framework,
- help avoid costly training mistakes,
- help identify opportunities for workforce development by amongst other things, identifying skills gaps based on a qualification framework,
- can have in-house training credit rated,
- help recruit the best fit for a position by matching the qualification levels with job opening, and
- make qualifications standards relevant to employer’s needs.

In another testimony an employer from Scotland said: “within the recruitment process, job evaluation panels have found the SCQF Framework useful in helping to understand how different qualifications relate to one another. In addition, it has also been used to identify the level of qualification for each post advertised” (from the presentation by Ponton).

10. SUMMARY OF DAY TWO DISCUSSIONS

(Dr. Terry Miosi, Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, Canada)

In his summary, Dr. Miosi provided current developments in the United States towards outcomes-based education. At the regional level,

- Middle States Commission on Higher Education: “Goals, including learning outcomes, are clearly articulated at every level: institutional, unit-level, program-level, and course level”
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges: “The institution publishes the learning goals and requirements for each program. Such goals include the knowledge, intellectual and academic skills, and methods of inquiry to be acquired. In addition, if relevant to the program, goals include creative abilities and values to be developed and specific career-preparation practices to be mastered”.

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North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission: “The organization’s goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible...the organization clearly differentiates its learning goals for undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate programs by identifying the expected learning outcomes for each.”

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges: Commission on Colleges and Universities: “The institution uses degree designators consistent with program content. In each field of study or technical program, degree objectives are clearly defined: the content to be covered, the intellectual skills, the creative capabilities, and the methods of inquiry to be acquired; and, if applicable, the specific career-preparation competencies to be mastered.”

Dr. Miosi concluded by reminding participants that the purpose of education is to address the needs of individuals, family/social preparation, economy and citizens.

11. CHALLENGES

There are several key challenges identified by the presenters and discussions from the conference to the successful development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks and a regional GCC framework. At the policy level, these are:

- the diverse status of in-country progress on the development of their national qualifications frameworks,
- the form and function of the governing agencies within and across countries,
- the lack of intellectual engagement in national qualifications frameworks discourse,
- an underestimation of the unwillingness of institutions to adopt the outcomes’ approach,
- conceptual confusions and contestations over competences and outcomes,
- lack of clarity of the purposes of the national qualifications frameworks,
- danger of losing the national status of the national qualifications framework when working with regional qualifications framework, and
- the nature of qualifications frameworks as contested artefacts.

At the practical level, institutions ask themselves the following questions:

- What benefits will the national qualifications framework bring to my institution?
- Will the introduction of the national qualifications framework be burdensome?
What about the United States branch campuses that do not use an outcomes-based education approach?

Does the national qualifications framework apply to online programs?

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

Number of recommendations also came up from the conference presentations and discussions. These are:

- the need for a strong experimental scientific approach to the development, implementation and evaluation of a national qualifications framework,
- the need for guidance and counselling across the system,
- the importance of a coherent and systemic implementation,
- allow time for challenges arising from qualifications frameworks to settle with stakeholders,
- know precisely what you want your national qualifications framework to achieve, and
- the need to shift to research driven policy.

13. FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

After the conference, participants were requested to complete an on-line questionnaire about attendance; achievement of conference’s objectives, usefulness of website, program, venue; and their overall impression. The following are the findings from the survey:

- Most participants attended the sessions on international, regional and sub-regional qualifications framework’s developments.
- All participants who completed the feedback questionnaire agreed that the conference provided an opportunity for policy-makers in the UAE and other member countries of the

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5 The full report of the survey is also available from the Qualifications Framework Project on request.
GCC to gain insight into the international developments on how qualifications are understood and interpreted.

- Not all the people strongly agreed that the Conference provided an opportunity for useful networking and professional development. The 39% which agreed and 4% that is not sure indicates some reservations amongst those people who completed the questionnaire.

- The “Overview of Related International Developments” was ranked by many participants as the very useful session, followed by the “Developments in each GCC Country”. Developments in MENA countries together with “Introductory Session” and “Conference Summary” respectively were ranked as just useful by many participants.

- The majority of people (96%) found the website to be good with 42% saying it was very good.

- Participants were also asked to rank the Qualifications Framework Project’s organization and handling of the event. All said it was good. Fourteen people said it was good, six said it was very good, and five said it was excellent.

- Also, participants were asked to rank the following social events: desert safari, Abu Dhabi tour, and gala dinner. Six people said they were good, five said they were very good, and two said they were excellent.

- Finally, participants were also asked to rate their overall experience of the event. Fifteen people said it was good, five said it was very good, and four said it was excellent.

It is encouraging that a number of people found the conference useful but of utmost importance is the fact that they are willing to work and participate more to realize the objective of a unified GCC Meta-Framework.

14. CONCLUSION

The 2009 Conference on GCC Qualifications attracted most of the current leading nations’ representatives in the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks. There were speakers from the European Commission, Ireland, Scotland, Malaysia and South Africa, amongst others. It also attracted the best people leading such developments in the MENA and GCC countries. Representatives came from Morocco, Jordan, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Sultanate of Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Bahrain and United Arab Emirates.

The progress in international developments of national qualifications frameworks is mixed. A number of countries seem to be still in the development stage. At the MENA regional level it also
seems the same. There are a few countries that have progressed quickly even though their frameworks are not yet at the national level. In the GCC, none has implemented a national qualifications framework, there are only a few sectoral qualifications frameworks in Saudi Arabia and Oman. To realise the dream of the Treaty of 1978 for Arab Countries, national qualifications frameworks are stepping stones towards that dream. There is a need for more work towards the establishment of qualifications frameworks as a common language in the region.

15. REFERENCES

UNESCO; (1978); Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States; Treaty: Paris.