



Comparability Exercise - Building Confidence to Support Recognition of Quality Assurance and Qualification Systems

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) education cooperation on the recognition of qualifications



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Background

New Zealand and Malaysia have maintained a working relationship in education since early 2000 (between NZQA and the Lembaga Akreditasi Negara, National Accreditation Board of Malaysia).

- Malaysia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement – establish a mechanism that allows for the recognition of the equivalency of qualifications granted within the other Party.
- NZQA-MQA Memorandum of Cooperation (14 April 2011) – to encourage and promote technical co-operation for the mutual benefit of both Parties.

Cooperation has developed confidence in the other country's quality assurance systems and qualifications:

- Recognition of Bachelor Degree project (pilot project)
- Recognition of Master's and Doctoral Degrees project (current project).



New Zealand Qualifications Framework



In 1992, New Zealand developed one of the first qualifications frameworks in the world – the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

A major change in 2001/2002 legislation resulted in the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications. The levels were extended from 8 to 10 on the NQF.

In July 2010, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) replaced both the NQF and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications. The NZQF:

- Is a definitive source for accurate and current information on quality assured qualifications in New Zealand
- Covers senior secondary school qualifications and tertiary education qualifications
- Employs the language of learning outcomes systematically across all the 10 levels
- Qualifications contain outcome statements which describe the knowledge, skills and attributes of a graduate
- Outcome statement is used by prospective employers and other tertiary education organisations, and for comparing qualifications.



Malaysian Qualifications Framework



Malaysia explored the need for an NQF in 2002 under the leadership of the then National Accreditation Board (LAN).

LAN was preceded by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency – established in 2007 (MQA Act , 2007) entrusted to implement the MQF.

Transition period was provided between 2008-2010 to allow migration to MQF for all programmes. Full compliance in 2011 onwards:

- Covers post secondary education and training qualifications
- Uses the language of learning outcomes and credits to provide for academic load and student learning time for each of the 8 levels
- Programme and qualification must provide the outcomes statements (guided by MQF and Programme Disciplines Standards).

Amongst the legal requirements of the Act provided are:

- No programme will be accredited unless it is in compliance with the MQF
 - Accredited qualifications are registered in the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR)
 - Equivalency and comparability assessment of qualifications must be against the Framework.



Governance



Set up Governance

A working group was established on the recognition of Malaysian and New Zealand qualifications.

Terms of Reference for the NZQA-MQA Working Group was agreed to:

- A reporting mechanism was agreed with co-chairs of the working group reporting to their respective Chief Executives (CEs)
- CEs report to the FTA Joint Commission
- A Working Group consisting of designated representatives of NZQA and MQA meet at least twice a year
- A Summary of Decisions is jointly agreed by CEs at the conclusion of each working group meeting
- Both parties work in the spirit of good will and cooperation to meet project milestones, deliverables, and outcomes.



Methodology



Set up Project

- Both Parties agreed to a pilot project: the ‘Recognition of Bachelor Degree project’.
- A Reference Framework was developed:
 - Methodology adapted well accepted international criteria: the criteria for verification that national frameworks are compatible with the European Higher Education Area framework (Bologna Framework) and the procedures used for self-certification of compatibility
 - Adapted criteria formed the basis of the Reference Framework for comparing each other’s systems
 - Exchange of information on each side’s qualifications and quality assurance policies and procedures populated the Reference Framework
 - There was free and frank discussion and questioning on each other’s systems as the text was drafted and agreed.



Methodology



Agreement on Technical Matching

Comparative analysis of the selected level of the NQF.

- Analysing the concepts along a scale of similarity – the ‘Best-fit’ approach:
 - Qualification definition
 - Level descriptors
 - Purpose
 - Learning outcomes.
- Analysing the non-outcomes criteria using a judgement of ‘Similar’ or ‘Substantial Difference’:
 - Entry and credit requirements
 - Relation to other qualifications/Progression opportunities.



Methodology



Contextual Matching - Engagement with key stakeholders

- NZQA and MQA also formed their own internal advisory groups and discussed feedback at NZQA-MQA Working Group.
- Consultation with relevant national stakeholders.
- Exchange and cooperation through engagement with key stakeholders.

Independent advice

- International experts engaged for both parties provided independent advice on the technical matching process.
- Comment and advice on the Reference Framework criteria, Reference Framework populated text, Comparative Analysis, and Judgements.



Methodology



Post comparability

- Periodic review highlights trends that might challenge and/or verify the outcome of the comparative exercise.
- NZQA and MQA updated the Recognition of Bachelor Degrees Reference Framework to review changes to legislation and functions.



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA



Agensi Kelayakan Malaysia
Malaysian Qualifications Agency

Overall Judgement



The NZQF Level 7 Bachelor degree and the MQF Level 6 Bachelor Degrees are comparable. The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) and Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), and their quality assurance systems are compatible with regard to Bachelor Degree qualifications.

The NZQF and MQF are unified and coherent frameworks. There are clear similarities in the way the NZQF and MQF describe learning outcomes, and the definitions and purpose of the Bachelor Degrees are based on similar concepts. Both frameworks operate similar robust and transparent entry and quality assurance systems.

[Qualifications that are required to meet regulated occupational standards for the purpose of practice are excluded]



Joint Statement



On 13 August 2012, NZQA and MQA signed a Joint Statement on the Recognition of Bachelor Degrees qualification.

The Joint Statement on the Recognition of Bachelor Degrees project found that the:

- NZQF Level 7 Bachelor degree and the MQF Level 6 Bachelor Degree are comparable
- NZQF and MQF and their quality assurance systems are compatible with regard to Bachelor Degree qualifications.

The NZQA Board endorsed the overall judgement and Joint Statement on 31 May 2012.

The MQA Council endorsed the report on 9 August 2012.



Confidence in Quality Assurance Processes and Outcomes: Technical Exchange Programmes



Technical Exchange

The purpose of the technical exchange programme was to verify the conclusions of the Recognition of Bachelor Degrees project.

- A schedule of activities (briefings, observations, site visits) allowed for NZQA and MQA technical staff to participate in, or observe the policies and procedures outlined in the Reference Framework.

The technical exchange programme provided:

- An increase in the capability of expert staff on NZQA and MQA qualification and quality assurance systems
- The establishment of a working partnership at an operational level.



Outcomes



Recognition of Bachelor Degrees Reference Framework

- A Reference document that provides the evidence and basis from which judgments were made for the comparative analysis.

Joint Statement on the Recognition of Bachelor Degrees

- A signed Joint Statement outlining the method, overall judgement, and conclusions under each criteria of the Reference Framework.

Technical Exchange Summary Report

- Verification of the findings through briefings, observations, and site visits.



Zone of Trust



- A 'Zone of Trust' was established between NZQA and MQA.
- The Recognition of Bachelor Degrees project has developed an understanding of each other's qualifications frameworks and quality assurance systems based on a common language of learning outcomes.
- Trust is established - relationships are built from a transparent exchange of information and the rigorous examination of information.
- Confidence is built between country qualifications systems through a shared understanding of each other's national qualifications frameworks.
- Confidence is developed between the parties - presenting evidence, answering questions and explaining policy as well as demonstrating and observing practice.



Future Work



Verification of the quality assurance policies and procedures has influenced further comparison work:

- Both parties are currently progressing the Recognition of Master's and Doctoral Degrees project.

Periodic review is important - updating the Reference Framework on a regular basis supports an ongoing relationship:

- Ensures the relevance of the comparative work
- Keeps each other abreast of changes to quality assurance and qualification policies and procedures.

Learnings from the NZQA-MQA partnership can be shared and applied to future work and other international recognition projects.

