

# MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK



**Agensi Kelayakan Malaysia**  
Malaysian Qualifications Agency

# **MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

**Point of Reference and Joint Understanding of  
Higher Education Qualifications in Malaysia**

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## GLOSSARY

**Malaysian Qualifications Framework:** an explanation or description of the national education system that is understood at the international level, which clarifies all qualifications and academic achievement in higher education (post secondary) and how these qualifications are meaningfully linked.

**Learning Outcome:** a statement on what students should know, understand and can do upon the completion of a period of study.

**Credit:** a quantitative measurement that represents the learning volume or the academic load to achieve the respective learning outcomes.

**Academic Load:** a quantitative measurement for all learning activities required to achieve the learning outcomes.

**Qualification Level:** an award level described with generic outcomes or a qualification descriptor which characterises typical qualification.

**Profile:** a specific subject or a field of study for a qualification or features that are different in conglomeration of qualifications of various disciplines which has a similar emphasis or level.

**Qualification:** a certificate, diploma or degree, which is awarded by a higher education provider or any party that is authorised to confer or to award the qualification and to affirm the earned learning outcomes.

**Qualification Descriptor:** a generic statement that explains the main learning outcomes for qualifications at a particular level.

**Point of Reference:** a non-prescriptive indicator that explains the articulated links between qualifications, learning outcomes and/or other related concepts to enable an individual to progress from one qualification to another.

**Recognition of Prior Learning:** a verification process of an individual's achievement of a set of learning outcomes acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning, irrespective of time and place.

**Higher Education Provider:** a body corporate, organisation or other body of persons which conducts higher education or training programmes including skills training programmes leading to the award of a higher qualification or which award a higher education qualification and includes the public or private higher education providers, examination or certification bodies or their representatives.



# **INTRODUCTION**

## **Definition and Features**

1. Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) is an instrument that develops and classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that is agreed nationally and benchmarked with international practices, and which clarifies the academic levels, learning outcomes and credit system based on student academic load. These criteria are accepted and used for all qualifications awarded by higher education providers. Hence, MQF integrates with and links all national qualifications.
2. MQF also provides education pathways through which it links qualifications systematically. This will enable the individual to progress in higher education through transfer of credits and recognition of prior learning, acquired from formal, non-formal and informal learning without taking into account the time and place in the context of lifelong learning.

## **Benefits**

3. MQF is a point of reference that is ratified and transparent. It contains information of each qualification useful for various parties such as students, parents, employers, the government, education providers, quality assurance agencies, accrediting agencies and industries, both local and international. Therefore, MQF promotes understanding and enhances public confidence in standards and systems of awarding qualifications in Malaysia.
4. MQF simplifies the process of international recognition and student mobility for employability and further education accessibility, based on international good practices.
5. MQF establishes the existing system of education by providing clear guidelines for programme design, naming qualifications systematically and eliminating confusion as to the meaning of each qualification. Its strong relationship with the employment market promotes the development of relevant educational programmes.
6. The MQF does not restrain academic development, instead it encourages autonomy through accountability and external reference.

7. MQF supports open access to education and social groups for individuals who have missed higher education opportunities to progress and enter knowledge arena easily through education pathways and enjoy the diverse fields of education and training for life, within and outside Malaysia.
8. MQF provides principles to realise lifelong learning policy, which is important in the development of a knowledge based society and economy, to face competition and new technology as well as to enhance unity, justice and quality of life.

### **Establishment and Development**

9. MQF is benchmarked against the main qualifications frameworks worldwide such as those of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. The European Qualifications Framework is now the umbrella framework for European Union countries, and is accepted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the Lisbon Convention, which includes signatories from Europe, Canada, the United States, Israel, Australia and New Zealand. Therefore, MQF facilitates communication with the various frameworks and higher education systems of major countries worldwide. It is also able to manage the increasing complexity of the education and training systems to forge collaboration in cross border education.
10. MQF is a dynamic structure that develops according to priority and national changes. Its dynamism is defended by developing and nurturing confidence and trust among all stakeholders who use it, which include students, education providers, government, qualification awarding bodies, academic staff, employers, employees' associations, voluntary organisations, professional bodies and societies. MQF provides the context for guided changes and improvement to the higher education system by all stakeholders. It is not just a technical process but also a social and political process.

## **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **Definition of Qualifications**

11. Qualifications are certificates, diplomas or degrees that are awarded by any competent authority, having affirmed that one has been successful in completing the study at the determined standard, and has satisfied the determined level of achievement and is able to take on a role, duty or work. Qualifications indicate positive achievement of learning outcomes, not as compensation as a result of failure or coincidence.

### **Qualification Awarding Sectors**

12. MQF contains post secondary national qualifications, which are conferred in the skills, vocational and technical, academic and professional sectors. Honorary degrees and certificates of attendance are not included in the MQF. Honorary doctorate should be distinguished from doctoral degrees in the MQF.

### **Levels of Qualifications**

13. MQF has eight levels, namely Certificate Levels 1-3, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral. The levels of qualifications are described and differentiated in Appendix 1 and summarised in Appendix 2. The qualification levels indicate the levels of capabilities. The typical qualifications at each level are described with generic features, which signify the expected capabilities from students in terms of:
  - (i) the depth, complexity and comprehension of knowledge;
  - (ii) the application of knowledge and skills;
  - (iii) the degree of autonomy and creativity in decision making;
  - (iv) the communication skills; and
  - (v) the breadth and sophistication of practices.

### **Learning Outcomes**

14. Learning outcomes are statements that explain what students should know, understand and can do upon the completion of a period of study. Learning outcomes are references for standard and quality as well as for the development of curriculum in terms of teaching and learning, the determination of credits and the assessment of students. In MQF, learning outcomes are asserted in three categories:
  - (i) levels of qualification;
  - (ii) fields of study; and
  - (iii) programme.

15. MQF emphasises eight domains of learning outcomes, which are significant for Malaysia:
  - (i) knowledge;
  - (ii) practical skills;
  - (iii) social skills and responsibilities;
  - (iv) values, attitudes and professionalism;
  - (v) communication, leadership and team skills;
  - (vi) problem solving and scientific skills;
  - (vii) information management and lifelong learning skills; and
  - (viii) managerial and entrepreneurial skills.
  
16. Learning outcomes for fields of study which cover subjects or disciplines are more specific than the learning outcomes for levels of qualifications. These are developed by a committee consisting of representatives of stakeholders from academia, industries, professions, employers, the government and other relevant parties for a respective field of study.
  
17. The programme learning outcomes are developed at the level of the higher education provider based on learning outcomes of the field. It covers all components such as courses, units or modules that form a programme and lead to the qualification nomenclatures. A programme containing only one main area is named according to its respective area, for instance, Architecture or Nursing. Programme with specialisation in at least 25% of the main field, the specialisation is indicated in brackets, for example, Computer Science (Programming). For double major programmes that contain fundamental components of two main fields with the percentage of 50-50, the qualification is named using the connector "AND", for example, Economics and Political Science. A major-minor programme that contains at least 25% component in other fields of study is named using the connector "WITH", for example, Economics with Mathematics.
  
18. The benefits of learning outcomes are the emphasis on "students and learning" and the attainment thereof and not only on how they are achieved. Therefore, the methods of achieving learning outcomes are not just limited to formal education. The attainments of learning outcomes are opened up to assessment and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) that are acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

## **Credit and Academic Load**

19. Credit is the quantitative measure that represents the volume of learning or academic load to attain the set learning outcomes.<sup>1</sup>
20. Academic load is a quantitative measure of all learning activities required to achieve a defined set of learning outcomes. These activities include lecture, tutorial, seminar, practical, self-study, retrieval of information, research, fieldwork, as well as preparing for and sitting of an examination. In Malaysia, 40 hours of notional student learning time is valued as one credit.<sup>2</sup>
21. This definition of credit and academic load is accepted and used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as Australia, New Zealand and the European qualifications frameworks. The uniformity in meaning and understanding facilitates the comparability of the various national qualifications frameworks, eases student mobility, supports curriculum development and simplifies recognition at the international level.
22. The benefit of the credit system is the enhancement of the higher education provider's autonomy to design and plan the teaching and learning activities that are no longer bound to contact hours based on total teaching weeks in a semester. Hence, this system supports the varieties in the national education system, which is characterised by the different periods of semesters between universities, colleges, polytechnics, and community colleges, and between public and private sectors. The credit system also supports the varied mode of delivery, namely full-time, part-time, weekend, distant learning, e-learning, and also non-structured learning in the informal and non-formal sectors. This system also ensures that student academic load is distributed evenly in an academic calendar.

## **Profile**

23. Profile refers to:
  - (i) a discipline or disciplines contained in a qualification, for example a bachelors majoring in Law and Accounting;

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<sup>1</sup> The minimum credit for each MQF level is proposed in Appendix 3.

<sup>2</sup> Each country uses transfer factors that are most appropriate to their respective education systems. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as in New Zealand, one credit is equivalent to 10 hours of national learning time. The European Qualifications Framework equates one credit with 25-30 hours of national learning time.

- (ii) a conglomeration of qualifications from different disciplines but having similar emphases, for example, a masters can be obtained by research, course work with in depth knowledge or professional training related to practice; and
- (iii) qualifications at the same level but having different purposes, for example, skills certificate based on competency, technical certificate which leads to a technical employment or pre-university qualification for entry into university.

### **Education Pathways for Individual Development**

24. MQF underlines the point of integration and overlaps of different qualifications in terms of types and levels. This is performed through regulations on accumulation and transfer of credits, accreditation of prior experiential learning, the mechanism of relatedness in fulfillment of the entry requirements to a higher level of education and the use of certificates and diplomas.
25. Students have the right to apply and be considered for admission to a higher level upon successful completion of a level of study. Their right for such entrance, however, is not automatic, as students may need to fulfill additional requirements for the higher qualification.
26. MQF, by linking qualifications, simplifies the process and supports student by indicating all possible opportunities and learning pathways for individual progress. MQF generates various alternative pathways with points of entry and exit that recognise individual achievements, thus, intensifying access and social boundaries by accrediting prior learning acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning.
27. MQF educational pathways make lifelong learning a reality as these give opportunities to individuals with knowledge and skills acquired from experience and self learning, to be assessed and given the opportunity to attain higher qualifications although they do not have basic qualifications.



## Appendix 1

### MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: DESCRIPTIONS OF QUALIFICATION LEVELS

#### Certificate Levels

##### Skills 1-3, Higher Education, Vocational and Technical

The Skills Certificate is conferred as a formal recognition to an individual who has shown the capabilities that have been acquired or practiced competently in the conduct of a task or work, usually “manual” skills. It is conferred without considering the ways in which the skills are acquired. The skills, often acquired cumulatively through stages of training and qualifications are usually recognised by competent authorities or industries.

The criteria and standards for these skills certificates are found in the National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS), developed by the Department of Skills Development under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Resources.<sup>1</sup> The criteria and standards of skills certificates are articulated to higher level qualifications and enables certificate holder to progress from semi skilled to skilled, right up to supervisory, executive and managerial phases.

The Vocational and Technical certificate prepares students for specific technical tasks and is the beginning of further training in the selected field. Normally, the programme is based on in situ training at the training institutions and contains at least 25% vocational/ technical contents.

The certificate is conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) interpret and use technical information;
- (ii) assist and use the scientific work process and the techniques of designing;
- (iii) identify the impact of regulations, laws and contracts upon work process;
- (iv) prepare the estimated cost of work process and its operation;
- (v) utilise techniques and capabilities to search for and use data in decision making, having considered social, scientific, and relevant ethical issues;
- (vi) communicate effectively and convey information, ideas, problems and resolutions to the experts and non experts;

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<sup>1</sup> The department was previously known as *Majlis Latihan Vokasional Kebangsaan (MLVK)*.

- (vii) attain team and interpersonal skills that are appropriate to employment;
- (viii) be responsible members of society; and
- (ix) use independent learning skills in further education.

### Foundation or University Preparatory Course

Foundation Courses or University Preparatory Courses such as *Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM)*, Matriculation and Foundation Certificates are not in the MQF as they are the entry qualifications to universities. Nonetheless, MQF determines standards for these certificates to ensure comparability and standardisation of student abilities. Generally, these are conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) show knowledge and comprehension in the field of study that is continued from secondary school as indicated in advanced text books;
- (ii) use knowledge and comprehension to identify and use data in respond to concrete and complex problems;
- (iii) communicate and clarify understanding and skills to peers and supervisors; and
- (iv) demonstrate skills for purposes of pursuing higher education.

### **Diploma Level**

#### Skills, Higher Education, Vocational and Technical

Higher Education, Vocational, Technical and Skills Diploma encompass capabilities and responsibilities that are wide-ranging and will at the end, lead to a career. The employment is in various fields inclusive of business and management, social services, healthcare, sports and recreation, information technology and communication, arts and design, engineering, building construction, science and technology, hospitality and tourism, realty management, agriculture and forestry.

Diploma level education balances theory and practice or practical, and stresses on the instillation of values, ethics and attitudes to enable students to:

- (i) use knowledge, comprehension and practical skills at work;
- (ii) assess and decide, taking into account social, scientific and ethical issues with moderate autonomy;
- (iii) be confident and entrepreneurial in pursuing their own careers;
- (iv) be responsible members of society;



- (v) possess study skills in adapting to ideas, processes and new procedures for career development;
- (vi) acquire team and interpersonal skills that are appropriate to employment; and
- (vii) communicate effectively and to transmit information, ideas, problems and resolutions cogently to experts and non-experts.

## **Advanced Diploma Level**

### Advanced Diploma

Advanced Diploma is a specific qualification, which identifies an individual who has knowledge, practical skills, managerial abilities and more complex and higher responsibilities than those expected at the diploma level. Advanced diploma is conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) use knowledge, comprehension and practical skills at work;
- (ii) assess and decide, taking into account social, scientific and ethical issues with autonomy;
- (iii) possess study skills in adapting to ideas, processes and new procedures for career development;
- (iv) acquire team and interpersonal skills that are appropriate to employment;
- (v) communicate effectively and to transmit information, ideas, problems and resolutions cogently to experts and non-experts; and
- (vi) identify problems in their field of study.

## **Degree Levels**

### Bachelors

A Bachelors degree prepares students for general employment, entry into postgraduate programme and research as well as highly skilled careers. It enables the individuals to pair responsibilities, which require great autonomy in professional decision-making. The bachelors degree is conferred on individuals who are able to:

- (i) demonstrate knowledge and comprehension on fundamental principles of a field of study, acquired from advanced textbooks;
- (ii) use the knowledge and comprehension through methods that indicate professionalism in employment;

- (iii) argue and solve problems in their field of study;
- (iv) show techniques and capabilities to search and use data to make decisions having considered social, scientific and relevant ethical issues;
- (v) communicate effectively and convey information, ideas, problems and solutions to experts and non-experts;
- (vi) apply team and interpersonal skills which are suitable to employment; and
- (vii) possess independent study skills to continue further study with a high degree of autonomy.

### Masters

A Masters Degree provides for the furtherance of knowledge, skills and abilities obtained at the Bachelors level. The entrance to masters is usually based on proven capabilities to pursue postgraduate studies in the selected fields. A masters degree is conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) demonstrate continuing and additional knowledge and comprehension above that of the bachelors degree and have capabilities to develop or use ideas, usually in the context of research;
- (ii) use the knowledge and comprehension to solve problems related to the field of study in new situations and multi-disciplinary contexts;
- (iii) integrate knowledge and manage complex matters;
- (iv) evaluate and make decision in the situations without or with limited information by considering social responsibilities and related ethics;
- (v) deliver clearly the conclusion, knowledge and the rationale to experts and non-experts; and
- (vi) demonstrate study skills to continuously progress on their own with a high degree of autonomy to do so.

### Doctoral

A Doctoral Degree provides for the further enhancement of knowledge, skills and abilities obtained at the masters level. It generally provides the graduate with the abilities to conduct independent research and is conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) show a systematic comprehension and in depth understanding of a discipline and mastery of skills and research methods related to the field of study;
- (ii) show capabilities to generate, design, implement and adopt the integral part of research process with scholarly strength;

- (iii) contribute to the original research that has broadened the boundary of knowledge through an in-depth dissertation, which has been presented and defended according to the international standards including writing in internationally refereed publications;
- (iv) make critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- (v) communicate with peers, scholarly communities and society at large concerning the field of expertise; and
- (vi) promote the technological, social and cultural progress in a knowledge based society in the academic and professional contexts.

### **Qualifications that Support Lifelong Education Pathways**

MQF provides pathways for individuals to progress in the context of lifelong learning. Three qualifications are created to facilitate this progression.

#### Advanced Diploma

Advanced Diploma is a specific qualification, which identifies an individual who has knowledge, practical skills, managerial abilities and more complex and higher responsibilities than those expected at the diploma level. Advanced diploma is conferred on students who are able to:

- (i) use knowledge, comprehension and practical skills at work;
- (ii) assess and decide, taking into account social, scientific and ethical issues with autonomy;
- (iii) possess study skills in adapting to ideas, processes and new procedures for career development;
- (iv) acquire team and interpersonal skills that are appropriate to employment;
- (v) communicate effectively and to transmit information, ideas, problems and resolutions cogently to experts and non-experts; and
- (vi) identify problems in their field of study.

### Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma

Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are qualifications that comprise competencies at the level of bachelors. The difference between the graduate certificate and graduate diploma is in the credit value. The qualifications are conferred upon the completion of education or formal training, recognition of work experience, inclusive of voluntary work or in combination. Graduate certificate and graduate diploma are used for purposes such as continuing professional development, changing a field of training or expertise and as entry qualification to a higher level with permissible credit transfer. These are conferred, without taking into account the previous qualification/s of the holder and are dependent on the aims of the qualification.

### Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma

Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma are qualifications, which contain competencies at least at the level of masters and acquired after obtaining a qualification equivalent to that of bachelors. A major part of the credits is at the level of masters in the related field of study or continuing skills or specialisation. The difference between certificate and diploma is in the credit value. In the professional fields, qualifications are usually conferred when the practitioner completes continuing professional education or advanced training which is more professional than academic in nature, so as to be known or recognised as experts. Examples of the use of postgraduate certificate and diploma are as certification for recognition of a competent practitioner to carry out continuing credentialing procedures in the practised field, for entry into a masters programme or towards obtaining a certain practitioner-status, such as Ir.

## Appendix 2

### MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: QUALIFICATIONS AND LEVELS

MQF Levels	Sectors			Lifelong Learning
	Skills	Vocational and Technical	Higher Education	
8			Doctoral Degree	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)
7			Masters Degree	
			Postgraduate Certificate & Diploma	
6			Bachelors Degree	
			Graduate Certificate & Diploma	
5	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Diploma	
4	Diploma	Diploma	Diploma	
3	Skills Certificate 3	Vocational and Technical Certificate	Certificate	
2	Skills Certificate 2			
1	Skills Certificate 1			

## Appendix 3

### MALAYSIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK: PROPOSED MINIMUM CREDIT

MQF Levels	Qualifications	Minimum Credit
8	Doctoral	No given credit value
7	Research Masters	No given credit value
	Fully or Partly Taught Masters	40
	Postgraduate Diploma	30
	Postgraduate Certificate	20
6	Bachelors	120
	Graduate Diploma	60
	Graduate Certificate	30
5	Advanced Diploma	40
4	Diploma	90
1-3	Certificate	60
	Skills Certificate	According to skills and levels