

# THAILAND

The establishment of a Thai National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was proposed by the Office of Education Council (OEC) of the Ministry of Education as part of the National Manpower Production and Development initiative during the Second Decade of Education Reform, 2009-2018. The Thai NQF builds on the existing Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF) and Thai Qualifications Framework for Vocational Education (TVQF) (OEC, 2013). It was approved by the Cabinet on 21 December 2010.

## 1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Thailand's economy has attained high levels of growth in recent years. However, a study by the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) on the qualifications of workers in the manufacturing and services sectors revealed that between 7 and 10 million workers in these sectors had no qualifications, 21.66 million had only primary education, and 5.94 million only lower secondary education (TDRI, 2010). Many workers had acquired competences on-the-job yet remained without qualifications.

The Thai NQF is intended to address this situation. The government sees the NQF as a tool for increasing manpower capabilities and competitiveness in order to meet the demands of production and services in today's rapidly changing economic climate. The NQF is thus designed to benefit both individuals and industry. By setting out unified standards for qualifications and clear learning outcomes, it will enable individuals to clearly visualize their own learning trajectories. Workers already in the labour market will be able to access learning pathways previously barred to them, and to have their previous experiences and learning validated, whether formal, non-formal or informal. This will in turn benefit industries by providing them with a better qualified workforce.

A number of measures are envisaged to improve the quality of education and training in Thailand. These include improving the quality of content, inputs and standards, introducing assessment based on learning outcomes, and ensuring internal and external assessment of educational institutions at every qualification level (Choomnoom, 2011). The capacities of educational institutions and of public and private sector training providers to implement the NQF will be strengthened, making them better able to meet the needs of production and services. Training will also be introduced to raise the calibre of educational personnel.

The Thai NQF is designed to facilitate regional worker and student mobility, which is expected to increase in the imminent future. The Thai government has signed an agreement with ten countries with the aim to integrate into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by 2015. Making Thai and foreign qualifications mutually recognizable, although crucial, will not be an easy task, and will entail harmonizing at all levels.

## 2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Thai NQF is intended to:

- make educational qualifications more relevant to industry needs, thus raising the quality of manpower in the manufacturing and services sectors;
- raise the standard of Thai qualifications to international level;
- make qualifications transparent and comparable across national borders;
- enhance the competitiveness of both domestic and regional labour markets.

## 3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The OEC has been responsible for various NQF-related activities, including:

1. Working closely with the Thailand Professional Qualifications Institute (TPQI) to communicate information about the skills required by industries to educational institutions.
2. Appointing a working team comprising representatives from various education and training sectors and relevant agencies to begin drafting the NQF based on the already existing design of the TQF and TVQF. Bodies represented include the National Education Quality Assessment and Assurance Office and the National Testing Office.
3. Undertaking research studies. One study, undertaken in collaboration with King Mongkut University of Technology during 2010-2011 (OEC, 2011), aimed to develop linkages between the skills standards required by key industry clusters and the learning outcomes of educational qualifications at secondary, vocational and higher levels. Employers, employees, educators and teachers were involved in the consultation process, providing in-depth analysis and synthesis. Key stakeholders from six industrial clusters<sup>1</sup> first identified core competences at each qualification level. A further nine industrial clusters were then identified to review the reliability of the comparisons made between occupational standards and educational qualifications.
4. Organizing three international conferences:
  - (a) the International Conference on the Implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks: Policies and Strategies, held on 28 April 2011, which was jointly organized by UNESCO, Australian Education International (AEI) and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ);
  - (b) a meeting between ASEAN member countries as prescribed in the Economic Cooperation Work Programme (ECWP) and ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), held in April 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand;
  - (c) a National Workshop on ASEAN Regional Qualifications Frameworks in cooperation with ECWP and AANTFTA, held in September 2011 in Bangkok, Thailand.
5. Appointing the NQF and ASEAN Qualifications Framework Development Working Group to study criteria for referencing the Thai NQF to the ASEAN regional qualifications framework and propose NQF development guidelines accordingly.
6. Organizing four public hearings on NQF Development, attended by representatives of the Federation of Thai Industries, the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand, and Commissions of Higher and Vocational Education.
7. Organizing four regional conferences in May, June and July 2012, before presenting the Framework to the OEC and the Cabinet for approval and implementation.

Overall responsibility for implementing the NQF is in the hands of the Ministries of Education, Labour and Industries, together with the Federation of Thai Industries and the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand. A national committee composed of qualified experts from educational institutions, workplaces and professional associations will be in charge of implementing the NQF in accordance with the principles and guidelines approved by the Cabinet. Also involved are the Office for National Educational Standards and Quality Assessment, the Ministry of Education, and the National Institute of Education Testing Service.

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<sup>1</sup> Food processing, petrochemicals, fisheries, tourism and hospitality, logistics, and jewellery making.

Four implementation strategies are planned:

**Strategy One** involves the development of systematic cooperation between workplaces, professional associations, professional and/or occupational groups and educational institutions in order to produce manpower equipped with the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes according to NQF guidelines.

**Strategy Two** concerns curriculum development in line with NQF level descriptors. Advocacy campaigns will be held to encourage workplaces, professional associations and educational institutions to work together to design curricula integrating formal, non-formal and informal education systems, and to determine learning outcomes and performance standards at each qualification level. A system will also be established for monitoring, evaluating and accrediting educational institutions in accordance with NQF levels.

**Strategy Three** involves developing systems for the assessment and evaluation of learning achievement, incorporating mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning and for credit accumulation and transfer.

**Strategy Four** involves strengthening educational institutions in their efforts to link education to the manpower demanded by the labour market.

#### 4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Thai NQF has nine levels. Each level is described by a level descriptor based on learning outcomes. The level descriptors were arrived at by linking educational qualification levels (secondary, vocational and higher) with the competence levels required by various industry clusters, thus ensuring the closest possible fit between educational content and industry demands.

**Table 1. Thai National Qualifications Framework (NQF).**

Qualification Levels (QLs)	Connecting /Filling-up Mechanisms	Work Experiences	Learning outcome sot Educational Qualification Levels (EQLs)
Level 9	Testing, measuring and evaluating transferred experiences from work; Accumulating learning units for raising EQL (Credit Bank)	Acquisition of additional knowledge from formal, non-formal and informal education; Promoting practical training and actual work performance for improving craftsmanship and level of occupational skills	Doctoral Degree
Level 8			Advanced Graduate Certificate
Level 7			Master's Degree
Level 6			Graduate Certificate
Level 5			Bachelor Degree
Level 4			Higher Vocational Certificate
Level 3			Vocatinal Certificate
Level 2			Upper Secondary
Level 1			Lower Secondary

Source: OEC, 2013.

#### 5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

One of the key aims of the Thai NQF is to give Thai citizens greater understanding of and control over their own education by enabling them to match formal educational provision with the learning outcomes and competences described in the NQF. Special attention will be paid to developing mechanisms of assessment which will allow workers to put their existing learning towards a full qualification in combination with other measures such as additional education and training or workplace-based learning.

## 6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Thailand's goal of integration into the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 provides a strong motivation for the timely and efficient development of the Thai NQF (Choomnoom, 2011). The launch of the AEC will turn the ASEAN region into a single market with a free flow of commodities, services, investment and labour. This is expected to boost regional competitiveness as well as cooperation, facilitating the sharing of educational resources and the development of common educational standards. The introduction of a single system for credit recognition and transfer throughout the ASEAN region will create opportunities for people wishing to work and study in other countries in the region. Regional referencing will also accelerate the process of bringing Thailand's own qualifications system up to international standards.

## 7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Government has identified a number of conditions for the successful implementation of the Thai NQF. These are:

1. The presence of a central agency to coordinate the work plans of the Ministry's key organizations and conduct public relations campaigns.
2. Clear presentation of information about the NQF to representatives from stakeholder agencies.
3. Close cooperation with key educational providers, both study and workplace-based, allowing them to share in the leadership of the NQF.
4. Support for the NQF's activities from all stakeholders.
5. Serious and concerted efforts to link the Thai NQF with the NQFs of other countries.
6. Targeting first and foremost the occupations and industry clusters which are of greatest strategic importance for national development.
7. Promoting decentralized collaborative partnerships between educational institutions and representatives of specific industries and/or professions.
8. Establishing a system of coherent and continuous monitoring, evaluation, research and development at national, regional and international levels.
9. Systematically enforcing ministerial regulations for the implementation of the NQF.
10. Making educational and training provision more outcomes-based by developing active learning methodologies such as combining work with education, project- and problem-based learning (OEC, 2011). These methodologies can be adapted to suit various settings, including on-the-job training programmes and internship or placement programmes.

## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Choomnoom, S. 2011 *Establishment of National Qualification Framework (NQF) and Planning for Manpower Production and Development according to NQF*. (Presented at the International conference on implementation of National Qualifications Framework, April 27-28, 2011, Bangkok, Office of Education Council, Ministry of Education.
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