



PACIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

**Educational Quality and Assessment
Programme (EQAP)
Pacific Community (SPC)**



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

VERSION STATEMENT

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This document is one of a series of three booklets. It should be considered in that context and not used for any other purpose.

The series comprises:

The Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS)

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF)

The Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF).

Pacific Qualifications Framework

**Educational Quality and Assessment Programme
Pacific Community**

Pacific Community

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. BACKGROUND	5
B. RATIONALE	6
C. THE PACIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK	7
D. PURPOSE AND KEY BENEFITS	8
E. THE PQF AS A META-FRAMEWORK	9
F. LEVEL DESCRIPTORS OF THE PQF	10
G. QUALITY ASSURANCE	11
H. THE ADVISORY BOARD	11
I. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL INITIATIVES	12
J. REVISIONS OF THE DOCUMENTS	13
APPENDICES	14
<i>Appendix 1: DEFINITIONS OF QUALIFICATION TYPES</i>	14
<i>Appendix 2: The PQF Level Descriptors</i>	20
<i>Appendix 3: REFERENCING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AGAINST THE PQF</i>	23
<i>Appendix 4: PQF Qualification Type Level and Credit Profiles</i>	26

A. BACKGROUND

Pacific Ministers of Education attending the inaugural Pacific Islands Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM) in Auckland, New Zealand in 2001 agreed to ‘consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education, benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications’¹. The ministers agreed that ‘education is the foundation for the process of economic and social development and that a mechanism is required to ensure that the Pacific Vision and Strategies for Basic Education are actively pursued’². In terms of achieving sustainable development, it is important to establish relationships between the various levels of national and regional educational provisions.

The ministers’ decision was prompted by a broader regional concern, expressed by Forum Economic Ministers in 1999, about the declining quality of Pacific education, which underpins the development of human resources. National and regional socio-economic development must be founded on knowledgeable, skilled and competent citizens. Within the context of the twenty-first century, huge challenges are posed by the continuing diversification of educational programmes and provision, globalisation, and the exponential growth and influence of information and communications technology. It therefore becomes critical for Pacific states to invest in good quality education and training that are internationally recognised and benchmarked.

In 2004, the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment, SPBEA (now referred to as the Educational Quality and Assessment Programme) was appointed to coordinate the development of the Pacific Qualifications Framework as was consistent with its mandate on educational assessment. SPBEA subsequently amended its constitution to accommodate the development of the framework, and the Accreditation and Standards Unit was formally established and became operational in 2014 as a result of the 2013 Review of SPBEA.

The Australian Aid Programme agreed to fund two key activities. One was a scoping study conducted in three clusters³ in 2007, which reported unanimous support from representatives of Pacific Island countries on the value and importance of a Pacific qualifications register. The second was financial support for a five-year project (November 2008 to January 2013, later extended to 30 June 2016) for the development of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards.

The years from 2009 to 2016 were the developmental years of researching similar regional developments to learn from, and engaging key stakeholders through in-country and regional

¹ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2007, the Complete Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP), FEdMM 2001 10(c)

² Ibid

³ Suva Fiji, Pohnpei Federated States of the Marshall Islands, and Honiara in Solomon Islands

consultations and workshops to ensure alignment of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards with developments of national qualifications frameworks.

By 2009, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu had started development of their national qualifications frameworks; Cook Islands and Niue have access to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework; the institutions (and programmes) in the northern Pacific – Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and Marshal Islands – are accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges of the United States of America; Nauru has determined to align with the Queensland State (Australia) system; Solomon Islands is close to completing the legislation for establishment of its qualifications framework and quality assurance agency; Kiribati and Tuvalu have adopted the Pacific Qualifications Framework and the Pacific Quality Assurance Frameworks for their systems. EQAP is committed to continue support of national developments of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance strategies of PIC member countries.

B. RATIONALE

Pacific Leaders' aim to strengthen the Pacific geographic region through *The Framework for Pacific Regionalism* as:

The expression of a common sense of identity and purpose, leading progressively to the sharing of institutions, resources, and markets, with the purpose of complementing national efforts, overcoming common constraints, and enhancing sustainable and inclusive development within Pacific countries and territories and for the Pacific region as a whole.

For successful implementation of this Framework, ... we seek the support, commitment, and ownership of all Pacific people, including governments and administrations, civil society organisations, private sector representatives, regional organisations, development partners, media, and other key stakeholders.⁴

One of the principal objectives of *The Framework for Pacific Regionalism* is: 'Sustainable development that combines economic, social, and cultural development in ways that improve livelihoods and well-being, and use the environment sustainably.'⁵ Sustainable development is underscored by an educated population who acquire internationally recognised and quality assured qualifications, skills and competences.

Recognition of Pacific qualifications and the professional status of workers across borders plays a vital role in strengthening the Pacific region, as it underscores the successful implementation of regional trade agreements. Not all Pacific countries have the capacity to

⁴ Page 1 of *The Framework for Pacific Regionalism*.

http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/embeds/file/Framework%20for%20Pacific%20Regionalism_booklet.pdf

⁵ Ibid, page 3

provide jobs for their surplus labour from within their domestic labour market. Regional trade agreements that have labour migration components⁶ provide alternative opportunities for employment, and this contributes to economic growth. And within the context of a globalised environment, there is great pressure to ensure that *qualifications* and *professional status* acquired in one Pacific country are recognised both within the Pacific region and internationally.

In building and sustaining national and regional development, it is important to keep abreast with the significant growth and changes in education and training, including the exponential growth of information and communications technology, the continued increase in cross-border provision (including online), the emergence of lifelong learning, the development of national qualifications frameworks and the concurrent improvement of quality assurance systems.

C. THE PACIFIC QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) aims to facilitate the realisation of a good quality education and training system in the Pacific region. It is a *meta-framework* or a reference framework. The PQF will establish comparability and facilitate recognition of qualifications across Pacific countries' education and training systems, as well as with other regional or international frameworks.

The PQF will also serve as a national qualifications framework for those Pacific countries that may not have the capacity to develop a national qualifications framework. The PQF level descriptors can be applied to complete qualifications and components of qualifications.

Adopting international practice, the PQF is distinguished by two key characteristics. The first is that it is *outcomes-based*. Each framework level describes in broad terms the progressive complexity of knowledge, skills and competence from one level to the next higher level. This enhances understanding of what knowledge, skills and competencies learners have acquired.

The second characteristic is that it is *credit-based*, where one credit represents the time an average learner takes to achieve the learning outcomes of a unit of study. One credit is approximately equivalent to ten notional hours of learning. One year of full time study is generally equivalent to 120 credits.

Credits define the volume of learning for complete qualifications and their components. The total credit value of a qualification is the sum of the credits of its components which may be courses, papers, units, modules or competencies expressed as whole numbers.

⁶ Such as the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement – Temporary Movement of Natural Persons; the Pacific Agreement for Closer Economic Relations with Australia and New Zealand (PACER Plus)

This system facilitates the transferability of learning as people move from one institution or country to another.

The structure of the Pacific Qualifications Framework is comprehensive, and recognises achievements from school, higher education, technical and vocational education and training, and non-formal learning.

The PQF has the following design features:

- ten levels that range from a basic certificate at Level 1 to a doctorate degree at level 10.
 - a. *Level 10*: Doctoral degree
 - b. *Level 9*: Master’s degree
 - c. *Level 8*: Bachelor with Honours; Post-Graduate Diploma; Post-Graduate Certificate
 - d. *Level 7*: Bachelor Degree; Graduate Diploma; Graduate Certificate
 - e. *Level 6*: Advanced Diploma; Associate Degree; Diploma
 - f. *Level 5*: Diploma
 - g. *Levels 1 to 4*: Certificates

10	Doctorate
9	Master’s
8	Bachelor with Honours, Post-Graduate Certificate, Post-Graduate Diploma
7	Bachelor, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma
6	Diploma/Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree
5	Diploma
4	Certificate
3	Certificate
2	Certificate
1	Certificate

The PQF has a set of defined qualification-type (e.g. certificate, diploma) at each framework-level, with a credit profile, and that defines how it relates to qualifications in other levels. The PQF is supported by the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework, a set of quality standards for accrediting agencies, institutions, programmes and courses. As a geographic regional framework, the PQF is an enabling instrument that is supported by regional agreements as well as international conventions and protocols.

D. PURPOSE AND KEY BENEFITS

The PQF addresses a range of important regional issues.

- i. It establishes a clear set of criteria for levels of learning achieved to effectively prepare people for the world of work and life as responsible citizens.
- ii. It establishes flexible pathways to staircase careers and promote social inclusion and opportunities for lifelong learning.

- iii. It reforms the education and training sector, as knowledge and skills are the engines of economic growth and social development.
- iv. It enhances international comparability and recognition of Pacific qualifications to facilitate portability of learning and integration of labour mobility into the international labour market.
- v. It is a platform for stakeholder communication and strengthening multi-sectoral cooperation.
- vi. As a strategy to alleviate poverty and pave the way for personal, social and professional development, the PQF promotes Pacific peoples' access to good quality education and training, and employment in any form.
- vii. It promotes and creates a *culture of quality* within agencies and institutions, and also in the design, delivery, assessment, and resourcing of education and training activities.
- viii. It may be adopted as a national qualifications framework by Pacific countries that do not have the capacity to develop a national qualifications framework.

The *qualification type definitions* and the *credit profiles* for each qualification framework level enhance transparency and understanding of the relationship between qualifications.

E. THE PQF AS A META-FRAMEWORK

The PQF is a referencing device or translating instrument to enable one framework of qualifications to relate to other such frameworks; and relate a qualification in one framework to a qualification in a different framework.

In order to determine comparability of national qualifications frameworks levels with the PQF levels, a referencing process is undertaken, taking into consideration the purposes of the framework, the context within which it is applied, the characteristics and design, the descriptors and credit profile, the definitions of qualification types, as well as the quality assurance arrangements that underpin each framework.

Establishing the comparability of a national framework to the PQF will enable qualifications already accredited and registered on a national framework to be registered at the appropriate level on the PRQS.

Pacific countries that wish to adopt the PQF as their national qualifications framework can use the definitions of qualification types, the credit profiles and the level descriptors, and can adopt the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF).

It is the rigour of application of the PQAF that will underpin the various stages of accreditation and the subsequent registration of qualifications (and their components) onto the PRQS. This will foster confidence of stakeholders in the quality of Pacific qualifications.

F. LEVEL DESCRIPTORS OF THE PQF

The PQF has three key domains throughout its ten levels: *Knowledge and skills*; *Application* (the kinds of issues or problems that the knowledge and skills are applied to); and *Autonomy* (the degree of independence, or organisation that is required to solve problems or complete tasks).

The PQF level descriptors have been developed, based on the principles that they⁷:

- are *neutral*, that is, they do not identify the learning or the workplace context;
- are *developmental*, so that each successive level implies a higher level of complexity of learning;
- *do not exclude specific learner groups* through the use of language or implied contexts;
- are *content free*; and
- are *not sector specific*.

The level descriptors⁸ describe, in broad terms, the knowledge, skills, and competencies that learners should possess or be able to demonstrate, upon completion of a programme or course of study. The descriptors are generic, qualitative statements that indicate specific learning outcomes at a given level on the PQF. These learning outcomes:

- i. take account of different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills, and wider personal and professional competencies;
- ii. are not intrinsically related to the period or field of study;
- iii. are intended to integrate academic, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and non-formal learning, and to apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning, etc.);
- iv. are not intended to be prescriptive but rather flexible enough to provide a guideline in the design and delivery of the curriculum for any field of study;
- v. are developed with the intention that the curriculum specialist will use professional expertise to translate them into a specific field of study;
- vi. may be used to aid the assessment of recognition of prior learning;
- vii. guide in locating a qualification (and its associated learning programme) at the appropriate level on the PQF; and

⁷ Bateman 2011 Bateman Andrea, 2012, *Review of the alignment of the Pacific Qualifications Framework with other Selected NQFs*

⁸ Adapted from Commonwealth of Learning, 2015, *Proposed referencing tool for the transnational qualifications framework*

- viii. help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the PQF.

G. QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. The PQF is underpinned by the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF – a separate booklet) that provides minimum quality standards and guidelines for accrediting agencies, institutions, programmes and courses. Agencies and institutions should refer to this document for mutual expectations of quality. The PQAF establishes a common baseline for all Pacific Islands’ accrediting agencies and Institutions to apply. It was informed by the INQAAHE⁹ Guidelines of Good Practice and the Asia Pacific Quality Network’s Chiba Principles.
2. Accrediting agencies provide an external quality assurance function for all education and training institutions and their programmes within their domestic environment. A balance needs to be established between institutional *accountability* and *continuous improvement*.
3. Education and training institutions must have effective internal quality management systems (QMS) that guide their work. Cultivating a *culture of quality* must permeate the Institutional operations and processes. Regular self-reviews against their QMS will inform the institutions about their performance and develop strategies for improvement.
4. The Accreditation and Standards Unit (ASU) of EQAP will coordinate a regional external quality assurance function that moderates potential variations in how quality is administered by accrediting agencies. The ASU will co-opt the services of relevant panels of experts, where necessary, for external quality assurance of accrediting agencies and the review of qualifications submitted by agencies, when necessary.
5. EQAP will employ a flexible but rigorous fit-for-purpose quality assurance approach. This approach will be mainly to validate that the quality assurance system of an Accrediting Agency or Institution is not only in place but effective.
6. The Accreditation and Standards Unit recognises the quality assurance function of other accrediting agencies, such as the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools,¹⁰ SPC’s Economic Development Division,¹¹ the Western Association of Schools and Colleges¹² of the United States, and other similar bodies.

H. THE ADVISORY BOARD

The Advisory Board for the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) also advises on the PQF. Members of the Advisory Board are representatives of national and regional accrediting agencies, including the Australian Qualifications Framework Council, the New

⁹ International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

¹⁰ The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools accredits theological education.

¹¹ SPC’s Economic Development Division conducts audits of maritime training.

¹² The Western Association of Schools and Colleges WASC accredits the schools and colleges in the American territories, such as Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and American Samoa.

Zealand Qualifications Authority, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and donor partners, and the Director of EQAP.

The Advisory Board provides strategic advice on the PRQS, PQF and PQAF regarding:

- a. national, regional and international issues and trends affecting quality assurance and qualifications frameworks;
- b. any changes to regional, national, sectoral or institutional policies and practices that may affect any recognition arrangements established;
- c. resolution of any issue relating to the registration of accrediting agencies, institutions or qualifications and standards onto the PRQS;
- d. any new developments in professional licensing and occupational standards;
- e. any new developments in traditional knowledge and indigenous skills;
- f. marketing and promotion of the benefits and advantages of registering accrediting agencies, education and training institutions, qualifications, courses and standards onto the PRQS;
- g. the benefits and advantages of the PRQS, including the PQF and PQAF, regarding learner and labour mobility;
- h. accessing industry and government networks; and
- i. any other related administrative procedures.

Since the Qualifications Unit that coordinates the PRQS and PQF is a unit within EQAP within SPC, the Advisory Board does not constitute an executive function. It reports to SPC's Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations through the Director of EQAP.

I. COLLABORATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL INITIATIVES

Regional agencies, such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the Office of the Chief Trade Advisor negotiate, on behalf of Pacific countries, regional trade agreements to increase Pacific countries' access to other domestic and regional markets. These agreements have labour migration components for which the *recognition of qualifications* and *occupational standards* registered on the PRQS are important.

The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is negotiating the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement and in particular the temporary movement of natural persons under Mode 4 of the WTO-GATS¹³ agreement. The Office of the Chief Trade Advisor negotiates market access into the Australian and New Zealand markets under the Pacific Agreement for Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus).

¹³ World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services
www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/26-gats.pdf

A sub-regional trade agreement by the Melanesian Spearhead Group's skills movement scheme (MSG-SMS) is also in progress. The MSG-SMAS is only between Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu with Timor Lesté as observer.

These three trade agreements all have labour migration components. As regional instruments, the PQF and the PRQS support these regional initiatives by facilitating the recognition of qualifications, the professional status of workers, and occupational standards, all of which are necessary prerequisites to the smooth implementation of labour migration schemes, particularly with developed countries.

J. REVISIONS OF THE DOCUMENTS

The PQF document must be read with the PRQS and PQAF documents. For continuing relevance, these three documents will be regularly revised to keep abreast with changes.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: DEFINITIONS OF QUALIFICATION TYPES

The summary descriptor for each PQF qualification type outlines the purpose, entry requirements (if any) and how one qualification relates to other qualifications on the framework. **The PQF qualification type summary and credit profile is included for explanatory purposes and for those Pacific states that choose to adopt the PQF as their national qualifications framework.**

Doctorate	PQF Level 10	Credit range is 360–480
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Purpose

The Doctorate is a research-based degree whereby the candidate becomes an increasingly independent scholar who makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge. It is normally the culmination of study which begins at the Bachelor level and reaches a stage beyond the Master's degree. For the PhD/DPhil and the named doctorate this development takes place under the guidance of recognised experts in the field of study and under circumstances that allow the candidate access to appropriate research resources. The Doctorate is awarded on the basis of an original and substantial contribution to knowledge as judged by independent experts applying contemporary international standards from within the discipline. The hallmark for achievement will be the candidate's capacity for substantial independent research or creative activity as attested by the educational institution and/or as demonstrated by submitted work.

The major component of all doctorates is original research. The body of work that leads to the award of a doctorate will be one of the following:

- a thesis (the PhD/DPhil);
- creative work in the visual or performing arts (the PhD/DPhil);
- a thesis or equivalent creative work in combination with coursework (the named doctorate);
- a thesis in combination with a creative work in the visual or performing arts (the named doctorate);
- published work (the higher doctorate).

Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD/DPhil)

The thesis constitutes the entire body of work on which the award of the qualification will be judged. Coursework may also be prescribed, but this will only contribute to the preparation for research and acceptance into the doctoral programme. Where appropriate, candidates may present a creative work as part of the thesis requirement.

Doctorate in a specified field or discipline – the named Doctorate (e.g. EdD or the DMus)

For a Doctorate in a specified field, coursework may contribute to the assessed programme of study but research or the scholarly creative activity and the associated thesis must occupy at least two full-time academic years and contribute not less than two thirds of the overall credit for the degree. The coursework, which is to be at a standard in advance of that expected for a master's paper, must be part of a coherent programme with the research work, and should normally cover no more than one full-time academic year. A doctorate must constitute a passing grade in both the coursework and the thesis or its creative work equivalent.

Higher Doctorate (e.g. the DSc or the DLitt)

Higher Doctorates are awarded for independent work of special excellence, as judged by leading international experts, which is completed before a person makes an application to enrol for the degree. Candidates will normally be expected to have completed at least ten years of independent work and to have published extensively. Publication will normally be in scholarly books and/or in reputable international journals. Doctorates in the visual or performing arts will constitute equally outstanding contributions in creative work.

Master's	PQF Level 9	Credit range is 120–240
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Purpose

A Master's degree qualifies candidates who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for research, a pathway for further learning, professional practice and/or scholarship. Master's degrees usually build on a bachelor degree, graduate diploma, bachelor degree with honours or a post-graduate diploma. They usually build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind. Their outcomes are demonstrably in advance of undergraduate study, and require candidates to engage in research and/or advanced scholarship.

Master's degrees are constituted in one discipline or a coherent programme of study. They may be undertaken by coursework or research or by a combination of both.

i. By coursework only

Entry to a Master's degree by coursework worth 120 to 240 credits is normally based on an undergraduate degree. The degree is achieved through coursework consisting of courses, project work and research in varying combinations. It may build on undergraduate study in the same academic field, or it may build on the more generic graduate attributes of an undergraduate degree in other fields, or in some cases on relevant professional experience. Master's degrees that build on generic attributes and/or experience (often called conversion masters) are usually in professional fields and are recognised as appropriate professional preparation by the profession or industry concerned.

ii. By thesis or primarily by thesis

Entry to a Master's degree by thesis is normally based on a bachelor degree with honours or a post-graduate diploma in the same field of study. The degree consists of a research project that is presented in the form of a thesis, dissertation, substantial research paper or creative work, worth at least 90 credits (at Level 9).

iii. By coursework and thesis

Entry to a Master's degree by coursework and thesis is normally based on an undergraduate degree in the same field of study. The degree includes a thesis, dissertation, substantial research paper or creative work worth at least 90 credits and may include up to 150 credits of coursework.

Master's degrees usually build on undergraduate degrees, Bachelor Degrees with Honours or Post-Graduate Diplomas. They may also build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind. The outcomes of Master's degrees are demonstrably in advance of undergraduate study and require students to engage in scholarship and/or research.

Entry requirements

The normal minimum entry requirement for a 240 credit Master's degree is a bachelor degree or equivalent. For a Master's degree of fewer than 240 credits, normally the minimum entry qualification is a Bachelor Degree with Honours or a Post-Graduate Diploma or undergraduate degree followed by relevant professional experience.

Relationship to other qualifications

A person who holds the Master's Degree achieved to an appropriate standard, and including a research component of at least 90 credits, may be considered for admission to a programme of advanced study and/or original research leading to a doctoral degree.

Bachelor Degree with Honours	PQF Level 8	Credit range is 120–480
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Purpose

A Bachelor Degree with Honours recognises distinguished study at Level 8. It may either be a degree in itself, or a discrete post-graduate degree following a Bachelor Degree. A Bachelor Degree with Honours may recognise: a particular level of achievement in a Bachelor Degree (480 credits or more) especially in relation to work of a research nature (typically at Level 8); achievement of Level 8 following a Level 7 Bachelor Degree.

Relationship to other qualifications

A Bachelor Degree with Honours should prepare graduates for admission to further post-graduate study.

Note: Where the honours degree is a 480 credit (or more) programme, the qualification must include an exit point that meets the requirements of a Bachelor degree.

Post-Graduate Diploma	PQF Level 8	Credit range is 120–240
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Purpose

A Post-Graduate Diploma is designed to extend and deepen a candidate’s knowledge and skills by building on attainment in the principal subject(s) of the qualifying degree, graduate diploma or graduate certificate. It prepares a candidate for independent research and scholarship in the principal subject of the diploma.

Entry requirements

A candidate for the Post-Graduate Diploma in a specified subject or, where appropriate, a related area will normally have completed all requirements of the relevant Bachelor Degree or Graduate Certificate or Diploma, or has the relevant skills and knowledge acquired through appropriate work or professional experience at an additional level.

Relationship to other qualifications

A person who holds a Post-Graduate Diploma may be eligible to be enrolled in a Master’s Degree.

Post-Graduate Certificate	PQF Level 8	Credit range is 60–120
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Purpose

The Post-Graduate Certificate is designed to extend and deepen a candidate’s knowledge and skills. A Post-Graduate Certificate involves credits from a specified subject and its associated areas. It recognises continuing professional development or academic achievement in advance of the candidate’s original bachelor degree or graduate certificate or diploma.

Post-Graduate Certificates require a Bachelor Degree or Graduate Certificate or Diploma in a related subject or relevant skills and knowledge acquired through appropriate work or professional experience.

Relationship to other qualifications

A Post-Graduate Certificate provides the basis for further post-graduate study.

Graduate Diploma	PQF Level 7	Credit range is 120–240
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Purpose

A Graduate Diploma is designed for degree graduates to pursue a significant body of study at an advanced undergraduate level. The Graduate Diploma is typically designed as a bridging qualification to post-graduate study as well as broadening knowledge and skills in a familiar subject or discipline, or developing knowledge in a new area.

Entry requirements

Entry is usually open to degree graduates or may be to those who have been able to demonstrate equivalent practical, professional or educational experience of an appropriate kind.

Relationship to other qualifications

A Graduate Diploma may provide the basis for post-graduate study.

Graduate Certificate	PQF Level 7	Credit range is 60–120
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Purpose

A Graduate Certificate is designed as a vehicle for degree graduates to pursue further study at an advanced undergraduate level. The graduate certificate is typically designed as a bridging qualification to post-graduate study for candidates developing educational, professional or vocational knowledge in a new discipline, professional or subject area and/or as a broadening or deepening of skills or knowledge already gained in an undergraduate qualification.

Entry requirements

Entry is usually open to degree graduates or to those who have been able to demonstrate equivalent practical, professional or educational experience of an appropriate kind.

Relationship to other qualifications

The Graduate Certificate may provide the basis for post-graduate study.

Bachelor Degree	PQF Level 7	Credit range is 360–480
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Purpose

A Bachelor Degree is a systematic and coherent introduction to a body of knowledge of a recognised major subject (or subjects in the case of a double degree or a double major) as well as to problem-solving and associated basic techniques for self-directed work and learning. A Bachelor Degree involves at least one sequential study programme in which content is progressively developed such that it might form a basis for post-graduate study and/or professional practice.

Entry requirements

A programme of study leading to a Bachelor Degree builds on prior study, work or experience and is open to those who have met the specified entrance requirements.

Relationship to other qualifications

A person who holds a Bachelor Degree may be permitted to enrol in a post-graduate qualification.

Associate Degree	PQF Level 6	Credit range is 120–360
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Purpose

An Associate Degree is a programme designed to recognise successful progression to the full degree or directly to employment. These degrees focus on learning within a work context, underpinned by both vocational and academic understanding, and enable learners to demonstrate learning outcomes that are explicitly relevant to employment and professional requirements. The Associate Degree will have at least 240 credits of which at least 90 will match the Level 6 descriptor.

Diploma	PQF Levels 5 and 6	Credit range is 120–240
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Purpose

Diplomas often prepare learners for self-directed application of theoretical and/or technical skills and knowledge. These qualifications recognise capacity for initiative and judgement across a range of educational, vocational, technical, professional, and/or management roles and often build on prior qualifications or experience.

Certificate	PQF Levels 1 to 4	Credit range is 40–240
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Purpose

Certificates may be used in a wide range of contexts across Levels 1–4, and are often used as enabling programmes or to prepare candidates for employment and/or further education and training.

Certificates can be benchmarked against school qualifications (e.g. at Forms 5, 6 and 7 levels if relevant).

Appendix 2: The PQF Level Descriptors

The Application domain can be deconstructed to *type* and *problem solving*; while the Autonomy domain can be deconstructed to *level of support* and *degree of judgement*.

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application	Autonomy
10	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve critical understanding of a substantial and complex body of knowledge at the most forefront of a discipline or area involve high level critical analyses, reflection of independent and original thinking involve the creation and interpretation of new knowledge or practice, through original advanced research that satisfies formal academic review 	<p>Applied in context that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are highly complex and specialised involving new or evolving aspects involve the formulation and testing of theories and processes to resolve significant highly complex, abstract and emergent issues 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal guidance and high level of autonomy, initiative, adaptability and self-direction authoritative judgement and high planning, management and innovation required
9	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involve mastery and integrated understanding of a complex body of knowledge some of which is at the forefront in one or more disciplines or areas involve high level critical analyses, evaluation, reflection and independent thinking involve research as the basis for extending or redefining 	<p>Applied in context that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are complex and specialised, generally involving some new or evolving aspects involve the formulation and testing of theories and processes to resolve highly complex, abstract and emergent issues 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal guidance and substantial autonomy, initiative, adaptability and self-direction expert judgement and considerable planning and management required

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application	Autonomy
	knowledge or practice in one or more disciplines or areas		
8	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are highly advanced, theoretical and technical, within one or more disciplines or areas involve critical, analytical and independent thinking 	<p>Applied in context that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are complex with some specialisation involve the formulation of processes to resolve highly complex and abstract issues 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> minimal guidance and demonstrated self-direction or autonomy significant judgement, planning, coordination and organisation required
7	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are highly theoretical and/or technical with significant underpinning knowledge, within one or more disciplines or areas Involve critical and analytical thinking 	<p>Applied in context that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are subject to complex change Involve the formulation of or substantial adaptation of processes to resolve complex and abstract issues 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad guidance and demonstrated self-direction Significant judgement, planning and coordination is required
6	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are highly theoretical and/or abstract or technical, within a broad field or with depth in one area 	<p>Applied in contexts that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are subject to change with some complexity involve the formulation of or adaptation of processes to resolve complex and sometimes abstract issues 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> broad guidance or direction well-developed judgement and planning required
5	<p>Demonstrated knowledge and skills that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are mainly technical and theoretical, within a broad field or with depth in one 	<p>Applied in contexts that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are both known and changing involve unfamiliar issues that are 	<p>In conditions where there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> general guidance or direction both judgement

Level	Knowledge and Skills	Application	Autonomy
	area	addressed using a range of processes that require some adaptation	and planning required
4	Demonstrated knowledge and skills that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are broadly factual, with technical and theoretical aspects 	Applied in contexts that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are stable but sometimes unpredictable • involve familiar and unfamiliar issues that are addressed by interpreting or varying processes 	In conditions where there is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine direction or guidance • judgement and some planning required
3	Demonstrated knowledge and skills that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are factual, procedural, technical, with some theoretical aspects 	Applied in contexts that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are stable and predictable • involve familiar issues that are addressed by selecting from known solutions 	In conditions where there is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine supervision and direction or guidance • some judgement and discretion required
2	Demonstrated knowledge and skills that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are factual or manual or operational 	Applied in contexts that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are structured and stable • involve straightforward issues that are addressed by set, known solutions 	In conditions where there is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • close support and direction or • guidance minimal judgement or discretion required
1	Demonstrated knowledge and skills that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are basic, foundational and explicit 	Applied in contexts that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are highly structured, defined and repetitive • involve straightforward and everyday issues that are addressed by simple and rehearsed procedures 	In conditions where there is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immediate support and clear direction • almost no judgment or discretion required

Appendix 3: REFERENCING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AGAINST THE PQF

Introduction

The Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) is a *meta-framework* for the Pacific's geographic region which comprises twenty-two independent states and territories. The PQF was developed in response to the Pacific Forum Education Ministers' determination in 2001 to 'consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications'.¹⁴ Since then, some Pacific countries have developed national qualifications frameworks including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. Cook Islands and Niue access the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, while the northern Pacific countries qualifications needs are met by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges of the United States. Nauru has indicated alignment with the Queensland State of Australia. Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu have adopted the Pacific Qualifications Framework (PQF) and the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) for their respective systems. The PQF provides coherence and transparency to diverse NQFs and qualifications from the Pacific states.

Referencing national qualifications frameworks against the PQF

The process of referencing national qualifications frameworks against the PQF identifies the level-by-level relationship between national qualifications frameworks and the PQF. This results in identifying the level of the PRQS where qualifications from countries are registered. Confirming the relationship between the levels of a national qualifications framework and the PQF facilitates the registration of qualifications from a country onto the PRQS.

A technical referencing of qualifications frameworks can focus only on a consideration of the taxonomy of the level descriptors and a comparison of the descriptors level-by-level. A more complete referencing must include the technical aspect, as well as an analysis of the underlying *quality assurance arrangements* and a monitoring of the *rigour* of the operational procedures, as well as review by some external experts where needed.

The EQAP referencing process consists of the following stages.

1. Identification of the purposes and underlying philosophy

Qualifications frameworks are developed for a variety of reasons and purposes. Some are national in nature, some are sectoral (only serve a specific sector), others are designed for a specific subject field (e.g. engineering). Prior to a comparison of a national qualifications framework against the PQF, it is very important to be clear on the *purposes* and the beliefs that underpin the development of a qualifications framework. For example, some frameworks are about courses while others are about complete qualifications. It can be difficult to compare these kinds of qualification frameworks if their purposes are very different.

¹⁴ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Complete Forum Basic Education Action Plan, FedMM 2001 10 (c).

2. *Analysis of the domains*

The domains (or taxonomy) of the level descriptors vary from framework to framework. The taxonomy of the level descriptors indicates the knowledge, skills and competencies that are considered important. The three key domains for the PQF are *Knowledge and skills*, *Application* and *Autonomy* where *Application* is deconstructed to *type* and *problem solving* and *Autonomy* is deconstructed to *level of support* and *degree of judgement*.

For some frameworks, the taxonomy includes *knowledge, skills, ICT skills, literacy and numeracy, judgement, and autonomy*. Other frameworks (e.g. the Commonwealth of Learning's Transnational Qualifications Framework) do not have a taxonomy for their level descriptors but have broad statements that reflect the graduate attributes for each framework level.

The number of categories for the taxonomy of a framework determines the ease or otherwise of finding a 'best fit' with another framework. Care is required to avoid putting 'square pegs into round holes' when comparing taxonomies of Qualifications Frameworks.

3. *A comparison of the framework levels*

The PQF has ten levels as follows:

- Level 10: Doctoral degree
- Level 9: Master's degree
- Level 8: Bachelor with honours; post-graduate diploma and post-graduate certificate
- Level 7: Bachelor degree; graduate diploma; graduate certificate
- Level 6: Advanced diploma; associate degree; diploma
- Level 5: Diploma
- Levels 1 to 4: Certificate

If another framework referenced against the PQF has the same number of levels and the qualification types for each level, the referencing is fairly straightforward.

If there is a difference in the number of levels and the qualification types at each level, then an initial technical levelling is carried out to determine possible alignment before referencing is conducted.

4. *Analysis of level descriptors*

Qualification frameworks are outcomes-based, in that each level describes in broad terms the knowledge, skills and competencies learners are expected to have achieved after completing a programme or course of study at that level. These descriptors are progressive from one level to the next.

The analysis of level descriptors of two frameworks determines how the outcomes for each level are defined. This is a painstaking process as vertical and horizontal consistency is considered.

5. *Analysis of qualifications definitions and credit profiles*

In tandem with an analysis of level descriptors is an analysis of how each qualification type is defined and the associated credit ranges. These three factors contribute to a final determination of the 'best fit' for each of the framework levels.

In broad terms, as the PQF is a referencing instrument, the credit range for the PQF is usually broader than a national qualifications framework to ensure that the PQF embraces all types of qualifications delivered within the Pacific region.

6. *Referencing the quality assurance arrangements*

Steps 1 to 5 above describe the 'technical referencing' of national qualifications frameworks against the PQF. The PQF is underpinned by the Pacific Quality Assurance Framework (PQAF) that provides minimum regional quality standards for accrediting agencies, institutions, programmes and courses.

The referencing of the PQF against another framework would be incomplete without a comparison or the referencing of the PQAF against the quality assurance strategy of the Qualifications Framework being referenced.

It is for this purpose that EQAP is developing an *external quality assurance function*. It ensures that all accrediting agencies and institutions share a common understanding of the quality expectations. At the same time, EQAP will also be open to external quality audit to ensure maintenance of its expected functions and continuous improvement.

7. *Monitoring the rigour of operational administration*

Steps 1 to 6 can be aligned and accepted at face value. However, it is in the implementation that the actual alignment of framework levels is finally determined. The third component of the referencing process is to observe the rigour of implementation of the operational procedures of the other framework. An on-site observation is usually arranged by mutual consent. This provides the opportunity for dialogue and clarification of areas that may not have been clear from the technical exercise.

8. *Referencing individual qualifications*

Referencing individual qualifications will follow the similar set of steps discussed above. It may be necessary for the Accreditation and Standards Unit of EQAP to communicate with the relevant accrediting agency and/or the institution from which the qualification was obtained to confirm some of the necessary details. The costs of referencing an individual qualification will be charged to the individual or the institution from which the query was received.

9. *Why the detailed process?*

EQAP's ASU is custodian of the Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards; the maintenance of the integrity and credibility of which is vital for Pacific countries, its people and wider stakeholders. EQAP's approach to referencing may differ from other regional systems and networks that do not maintain a regional register of qualifications and standards. In many cases, a register of qualifications is often left to each individual national agency or institution.

Appendix 4: PQF Qualification Type Level and Credit Profiles

Note: This table will facilitate the accreditation of qualifications through the PQF. It will assist in determining the level at which the qualification will be registered on the PRQS with reference to the qualification type definition, the level descriptor and the credit profile.

Qualification type	Level assigned	Min overall	Max overall ¹⁵	No. of credits at highest level	Number of credits at lowest level
Doctorate	10	360	480		
Masters ¹⁶	9	240	480	Minimum of 40 credits at Level 9 with the remainder at Level 8 OR Minimum of 40 credits at Level 9 with the remainder at Level 8	Minimum 240 credits at Levels 8 and 9 Minimum of 120 credits at Levels 8 and 9 (if programme is preceded by 4 years of prior study at Bachelor degree level or above)
Post graduate diploma	8	120	240	Minimum of 72 credits at Level 8	Minimum of 120 credits from Level 7 and above
Post graduate certificate	8	60	120	Minimum of 60 credits at Level 8	

¹⁵ Maximum overall volume is a suggested field.

¹⁶ Refer to Qualification Type summary for more details.

Qualification type	Level assigned	Min overall	Max overall ¹⁵	No. of credits at highest level	Number of credits at lowest level
Bachelor Honours	8	480		Minimum of 120 credits embedded in a 480 credit (or more) Bachelor degree (at Level 8) at a particular level of achievement ¹⁷ OR Minimum of 120 credits at Level 8 following a Level 7 Bachelor degree (either as a part of an integrated honours degree or as a separate qualification), with a research component.	Minimum of 30 credits at Level 8 of research component
Graduate Diploma	7	120	240	Minimum of 72 credits at level 7 or above	Minimum of 360 credits at levels 5 - 7
Graduate Certificate		60	120	Minimum of 40 credits at level 7 or above	
Bachelor		360	480	Minimum of 72 credits at Level 7 or higher The degree should specify a spread of credit across levels so that the qualification, demonstrates progression, reflects the requirements of the degree definition and achieves the associated learning outcomes in a way that is appropriate to the subject area.	
Diploma	6	120	240	At least 72 credits at level 6.	Minimum of 120 of all credits at level 5 and above,
Diploma	5	120	240	At least 72 credits at level 5.	Minimum of 120 of all credits at level 4 and above,

¹⁷ Exit point must be provided at end of study that meets the requirements of a Bachelor Degree.

Qualification type	Level assigned	Min overall	Max overall¹⁵	No. of credits at highest level	Number of credits at lowest level
Certificate	4	40	240	Minimum of 40 credits at level 4 or above.	
Certificate	3	40	240	Minimum of 40 credits at level 3 or above.	
Certificate	2	40	120	Minimum of 40 credits at level 2 or above.	
Certificate	1	40	120	Minimum of 40 credits at level 1 or above.	

Appendix 5: GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Accreditation	The process of assessment and review that enables a higher education programme or institution to be recognised or certified as meeting appropriate quality standards.
Accredited qualifications	Qualifications which have been quality assured or granted approval by an accrediting agency as having met appropriate standards.
Accrediting agency	Accrediting agencies are those entities that manage programme accreditation under national legislation e.g. national qualifications agencies, official review boards or other nationally approved bodies or agencies with the remit to accredit qualifications. All accrediting agencies are subject to ongoing monitoring and periodic review of their performance against standards.
Assessment (of institutions or programmes)	The process for establishing the educational quality of a higher education institution or programme.
Assessment (of an individual)	The process of collecting and evaluating evidence to establish the level of an individual's achievement or performance.
Benchmarks	A set of points of reference or standards against which something may be measured or compared.
Competency	The ability to use knowledge and/or skills in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development.
Components of a qualification	Components of a qualification; also known as subjects, units, modules, courses, papers, competencies. This is the smallest part of a qualification or programme that can be separately assessed and certified.
Credit	The numerical value assigned to a full qualification, as well as to its components, that represents the estimated or notional time needed for a typical learner to demonstrate that all the specified

Term	Definition
	outcomes have been achieved.
Credit transfer	<p>Credit transfer assesses the initial accredited qualification or component of a qualification that an individual is using to claim access to, or the award of credit in a destination qualification or component of a qualification.</p> <p>The assessment determines the extent of equivalence of outcome and may be facilitated by the PQF rating of level of difficulty and credit value.</p>
Learning outcome	<p>Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner can be expected to know, understand and/or do as a result of a learning experience. Learning outcomes provide a clear statement of achievement.</p>
Level descriptors	<p>The description of the characteristics of a qualification or components of qualifications that includes broad statements on levels of complexity of knowledge and skills, application and autonomy.</p>
Life skills	<p>Knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviours embedded in the local (and embracing the global) context which empower an individual to improve and sustain a suitable quality of life in their community and beyond.</p>
Literacy	<p>Knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to communicate through any form of language of their society, with respect to everyday life.</p>
National qualifications	<p>National qualifications are developed to meet a specific national priority need or interest. Their development has involved the appropriate national industry, profession or community group related to the qualification outcomes. The qualification and its development process must have widespread endorsement to be termed a <i>national qualification</i>.</p>
Numeracy	<p>Knowledge and skills necessary to empower a person to be able to use numbers in mathematical processes, as well as the language of mathematics, for a variety of purposes, with respect to everyday life.</p>

Term	Definition
Pacific Qualifications Framework	<p>The Pacific Qualifications Framework is a translation device for Pacific Island country qualifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to enable a coherent understanding of the various national Pacific Island country frameworks, qualifications and components of qualifications; to facilitate credit transfer; and to promote workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitate opportunities for lifelong learning.
Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards	<p>The Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards is the regional database of quality assured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> qualifications (and components of qualifications); occupational skills and standards; and Pacific traditional knowledge and indigenous skills.
Programme	<p>A programme is a coherent cluster of well-designed units, modules, courses, subjects that may lead to a complete qualification.</p>
Provider	<p>A person or an organisation that plans and delivers education/training and assessment services that lead to the award of qualifications or components of qualifications.</p>
Qualification	<p>Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by an institution, attesting the successful completion of an education/training programme.</p>
Qualification (award of)	<p>Formal recognition by a recognised awarding organisation that a person has successfully achieved all the required learning outcomes relevant to an identified programme of study.¹⁸</p>
Qualification framework	<p>A coherent structure that establishes clear relationships between all quality assured qualifications offered within an education and training system according to an established set of criteria.</p>
Quality	<p>Quality is the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils requirements.</p> <p>Quality is a complex, multiple dimensional and often subjective concept as it is most often determined by different stakeholders</p>

¹⁸ This may be referred to as certification.

Term	Definition
	<p>under usually very different circumstances. In assuring the quality of education and training activities, 'quality' is applied and understood to mean any of 'excellence', 'fit for purpose', 'achieving thresholds' and 'enhancement'. In this context, all of these meanings are assumed and will predominantly be both 'fit for purpose' and for 'continuous improvement'.¹⁹</p>
Quality assurance	<p>All activities that provide assurance that the educational and training services of an organisation are continually being delivered effectively, to the required standard, and in line with published goals and objectives.</p>
Quality audit	<p>A systematic, independent and documented process for gathering evidence and evaluating it objectively to determine the extent to which the quality assurance standards are met and fulfilled.²⁰</p>
Quality management system	<p>A quality management system aims 'to direct and control an organisation with regard to quality'. An organisation shall establish, document, implement and maintain a quality management system and continually improve its effectiveness. The quality management system documentation could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a manual comprising its quality policies and quality objectives; • procedures and records appropriate to key functions; and • records necessary to ensure the effective planning, operation and control of its processes.²¹
Recognition of providers	<p>Recognition/registration processes include formal acknowledgement by a registering body that a provider meets relevant standards that confirms its capability to deliver education and training programmes. A provider must be recognised/registered in order to deliver and assess accredited programmes and issue awards.</p> <p>Some agencies differentiate between the two processes: recognition and registration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>recognition</i>: formal acknowledgement that the provider meets key generic standards,²² and

¹⁹ Adapted from INQAAHE Module 2 Unit 1 on 'Quality Assurance in Higher Education'

²⁰ Adapted from (AS/NZS ISO 19011:2003: Guidelines for quality and/or environmental management systems auditing

²¹ Adapted from AS/NZS ISO 9001: 2008, Quality management systems— Requirements

²² Samoa Qualifications Authority refers to this process as 'listing'.

Term	Definition
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>registration</i>: formal acknowledgement that the provider meets specific standards related to the provision of teaching, learning and assessment of a specific programme. <p>For the purpose of the PRQS and related documents, registration of providers is the term used for both processes.</p>
Recognition of prior learning	A process to formally recognise and validate the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired outside the formal education and training systems. Also known as ‘assessment of prior learning’ or ‘recognition of current competencies’.
Recognition of qualifications	A formal acknowledgment as defined and given by the competent recognition authorities of the value of a foreign education qualification.
Referencing qualifications frameworks	A process used to compare and determine the close relationship between the respective levels of two qualifications frameworks.
Registering body	An agency responsible for quality assuring and registering education and training institutions and their programmes.
Registered provider	An institution or provider that has satisfied a set of quality criteria and is granted approval by a competent authority to operate and deliver education and training programmes.
Registration of qualifications	Registration of qualifications and components of qualifications pertains to the quality assurance processes undertaken by the Accreditation and Standards Unit, EQAP, prior to listing qualifications on the Pacific Register. ²³

²³ Registration of qualifications may also occur at National Qualifications Agency level.