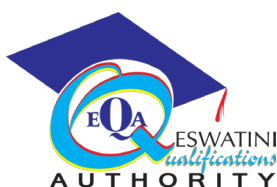


KINGDOM OF ESWATINI

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

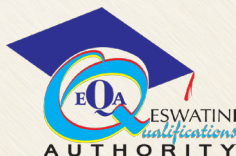
Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

Version 1.1 (2026)



Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

*“Advancing Lifelong Learning, Quality
Qualifications and Skills for National
Development and Global Competitiveness”.*



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FOREWORD

The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini continues to recognise the strategic importance of the Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDS) in advancing inclusive economic growth, social cohesion and improved quality of life for all Eswatini. The Ministry of Education and Training remains committed to strengthening the sector to ensure that the education system produces competent graduates equipped with relevant knowledge, skills and values required for national development and global competitiveness.

In 2010, the Ministry conducted a comprehensive sector analysis to assess the adequacy of the education and training system in supporting sustainable economic growth and development. The analysis highlighted the urgent need to realign the sector to produce development-oriented skills that respond to labour market demands and the evolving knowledge economy. One of the major recommendations emerging from the study was the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework.

The Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) was subsequently developed as a comprehensive national system for the classification, quality assurance, recognition and articulation of qualifications within the Kingdom of Eswatini. The implementation and maintenance of the ESQF is coordinated by the Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) in collaboration with key stakeholders across the education, training and skills development sector.

The ESQF represents a deliberate national intervention aimed at addressing challenges such as fragmented qualifications systems, weak articulation pathways, inadequate alignment between education and labour market needs, and limited opportunities for lifelong learning. The Framework promotes transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications while facilitating learner mobility and progression across education and training pathways.

The ESQF embraces the learning outcomes approach, which focuses on what learners are expected to know, understand and demonstrate upon completion of learning.



This approach supports the development of relevant curricula, qualifications and training programmes that enhance employability, innovation and productivity.

The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini remains committed to ensuring that the ESQF serves as a transformative instrument for human capital development and national competitiveness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Owen S. Nxumalo', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Owen S. Nxumalo (MP)
Honourable Minister for Education and Training

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EGCSE	Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education
EQA	Eswatini Qualifications Authority
ESHEC	Eswatini Higher Education Council
ESQF	Eswatini Qualifications Framework
ETSDS	Education, Training and Skills Development Sector
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework



CHAPTER I

Introduction and Policy Context

1.1 Background

Eswatini recognises education, training and skills development as critical pillars for economic growth, poverty reduction, social inclusion and global competitiveness. Human capital development remains central to the country's national development agenda and socio-economic transformation. The mission of the Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDS) is:

“To provide relevant, quality and affordable education and training opportunities for the entire populace of the Kingdom of Eswatini in order to develop all positive aspects of life for self-reliance, social and economic development and global competitiveness.”

The vision of the sector is:

“Attainment of equality in educational opportunities for all pupils of school-going age and adults irrespective of their socio-economic background, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their productive capacity, thus improving the quality of their lives.”

1.2 Rationale for the ESQF

The development of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) is a strategic national response to the evolving demands of the economy, labour market and society. As Eswatini advances towards a knowledge-based and technology-driven economy, there is increasing recognition that education, training and skills development systems must produce graduates who are competent, adaptable, innovative and globally competitive.

Prior to the establishment of the ESQF, the education and training landscape was characterised by fragmentation, weak articulation pathways and inconsistencies in qualifications standards across sectors. Qualifications were often developed and implemented in isolation, resulting in limited comparability, duplication of learning,

restricted learner mobility and inadequate recognition of skills acquired through different learning pathways.

The ESQF was therefore developed to create an integrated and coherent national qualifications system that supports lifelong learning, quality assurance, articulation and recognition of qualifications. The Framework establishes nationally agreed levels and descriptors that enable qualifications to be classified according to learning outcomes, complexity and volume of learning.

The rationale for the ESQF is further informed by the following key considerations:

1.2.1 Improving Relevance of Education and Training

The ESQF seeks to strengthen the responsiveness of education and training to national development priorities, labour market demands and industry needs. The Framework promotes learning outcomes-based qualifications that are aligned to occupational standards, employability skills, entrepreneurship and technological advancement.

1.2.2 Promoting Coherence and Integration

The ESQF addresses fragmentation within the education and training system by providing a unified national structure for qualifications across general education, TVET, higher education and professional learning. The Framework supports vertical and horizontal articulation between qualifications and learning pathways, thereby facilitating learner progression and mobility.

1.2.3 Strengthening Quality Assurance and Credibility

The ESQF provides a basis for enhancing the credibility, consistency and comparability of qualifications. Through nationally agreed level descriptors, standards and quality assurance mechanisms, the Framework supports public confidence in qualifications awarded within Eswatini. It also facilitates comparability of local qualifications with regional and international frameworks.

1.2.4 Supporting Lifelong Learning

The Framework recognises that learning occurs in multiple contexts, including formal, non-formal and informal environments. The ESQF therefore promotes lifelong learning by enabling Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), flexible learning pathways, credit accumulation and transfer arrangements. This allows individuals to enter, exit and re-enter education and training at different stages of life.

1.2.5 Facilitating National, Regional and International Recognition

The ESQF supports the recognition and portability of qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally. Alignment with regional and continental frameworks such as the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) enhances comparability and mobility of learners and workers.

1.2.6 Supporting Human Capital Development and Economic Growth

The ESQF contributes to national human capital development by promoting acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, competencies and values required for socio-economic transformation. By strengthening qualifications systems and improving the quality and relevance of education and training, the Framework supports productivity, innovation, employability and national competitiveness.

1.2.7 Recognising Skills Acquired Outside Formal Education

Many individuals acquire valuable competencies through work experience, community engagement and informal learning. The ESQF creates opportunities for recognition, validation and accreditation of such learning through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms, thereby improving access, inclusion and participation in education and training.

1.3 Contextualising the ESQF

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have become globally recognised mechanisms for transforming education and training systems. More than 147 countries worldwide have adopted qualifications frameworks to improve comparability, quality assurance, learner mobility and recognition of learning.

The ESQF forms part of Eswatini's broader national reform agenda aimed at transitioning towards a knowledge-based and technology-driven economy. The Framework provides an integrated national system for the classification, registration, quality assurance, comparison and recognition of qualifications based on learning outcomes and credits.

1.4 Purpose of the ESQF

The primary purpose of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework is twofold:

(a) Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Improving understanding of learning and qualifications, and how they relate to each other.
- Improving access to education and training.
- Making progression routes easier and clearer thus improving learner and career mobility.
- Increasing scope for recognition of prior learning.

(b) Quality Assurance and Recognition

- Ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived industry and socio-economic needs.
- Ensuring compatibility of the same qualification offered by different institutions
- Ensuring that education and training standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and applied consistently.



1.5 Guiding Principles of the ESQF

This policy is predicated on the following guiding principles and values:

Integration: forming part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training.

Relevance: remaining responsive and appropriate to national development needs.

Credibility: to have national and international value and acceptance.

Coherence: working within a consistent framework of principles and certification.

Flexibility: allowing multiple pathways to the same learning ends.

Standards: being expressed in terms of nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes.

Legitimacy: providing for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and coordination of standards and qualifications.

Access: providing ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression.

Articulation: a provision to learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system.

Progression: ensuring that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system.

Portability: to enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another.

Recognition of Prior Learning: an assessment process to evaluate learning outcomes that have already been achieved, formally or informally, through work, life experience or other activities. Prior learning may allow entry to qualifications or provide credits towards achieving a qualification.

Guidance: providing counselling for learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognized standards for educators and trainers.

Clarity: The framework should be clear and comprehensible to all stakeholders



CHAPTER 2

Governance and Coordination of the ESQF

2.1 Governance of the ESQF

The Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) serves as the national coordinating body responsible for the development, implementation, coordination, maintenance and continuous review of the ESQF.

2.2 Functions of the EQA

In fulfilling its mandate, the EQA performs strategic, regulatory, coordinating and advisory functions aimed at ensuring coherence, quality, transparency and comparability of qualifications within the Kingdom of Eswatini.

2.2.1 Development and Maintenance of ESQF Policies, Standards and Guidelines

The EQA develops, reviews and maintains policies, standards, criteria and operational guidelines necessary for the effective implementation of the ESQF. This includes policies and frameworks relating to qualifications development, learning outcomes, credits, level descriptors, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), articulation, credit transfer and micro-credentials. The EQA continuously reviews the ESQF to ensure responsiveness to national development priorities, labour market demands, technological advancements and international developments in education and training.

2.2.2 Coordination of Registration and Classification of Qualifications

The EQA coordinates the registration, classification and alignment of qualifications on the ESQF in accordance with approved criteria, standards and level descriptors. The registration process ensures that qualifications registered on the ESQF are quality assured, nationally relevant and internationally comparable.

2.2.3 Promotion of Transparency and Recognition of Qualifications

The EQA promotes transparency, understanding and public confidence in qualifications awarded within the Kingdom of Eswatini.

This includes:

- Facilitating national, regional and international recognition of qualifications;
- Promoting comparability of qualifications;
- Providing information and guidance on qualifications and qualification pathways;
- Supporting qualifications verification and authentication systems;
- Enhancing public awareness and understanding of the ESQF.

The EQA further supports recognition of foreign qualifications in collaboration with relevant regulatory and professional bodies.

2.2.4 Facilitation of Articulation, Credit Transfer and Learner Progression

The EQA promotes learner mobility and progression within and across education, training and skills development sectors.

This includes:

- Supporting development of articulation pathways between qualifications;
- Facilitating credit accumulation and transfer arrangements;
- Promoting flexible learning pathways;
- Supporting progression between academic, vocational and occupational qualifications;
- Reducing unnecessary duplication of learning.

The ESQF therefore enables learners to enter, exit and re-enter education and training systems at different stages of learning and career development.

2.2.5 Coordination of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

The EQA coordinates national systems and policies for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).



This function includes:

- Developing standards, criteria and guidelines for RPL implementation;
- Promoting recognition of skills and competencies acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- Supporting institutions and sectors in implementing RPL systems;
- Facilitating access, progression and certification through RPL;
- Promoting lifelong learning and inclusion.

The RPL system supports individuals who have acquired competencies through work experience, community learning and other life experiences.

2.2.6 Maintenance of National Qualifications Databases and Learner Records

The EQA establishes and maintains integrated national qualifications databases and learner records systems associated with the ESQF.

This includes:

- Maintaining a National Qualifications Register;
- Supporting digital verification and authentication of qualifications;
- Developing secure learner records management systems.

These systems strengthen efficiency, portability of qualifications and evidence-based planning within the education and training sector.

2.2.7 Alignment with Regional and Continental Frameworks

The EQA coordinates alignment of the ESQF with regional, continental and international qualifications frameworks and recognition systems.

This includes alignment with:

- The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF);
- The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF);
- UNESCO recognition conventions;
- Other relevant international frameworks and standards.

Alignment promotes international comparability, learner and labour mobility, regional integration and global competitiveness.

2.2.8 Coordination of National and International Qualifications Recognition Initiatives

The EQA coordinates national and international qualifications recognition initiatives aimed at promoting transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications.

This includes:

- Establishing qualifications recognition systems and procedures;
- Facilitating equivalence and comparability assessments;
- Collaborating with regional and international recognition bodies;
- Supporting implementation of qualifications recognition conventions;
- Promoting mutual recognition arrangements.

The EQA therefore contributes to strengthening mobility of learners, graduates and professionals within the region and internationally.

2.3 Stakeholder Participation

Implementation of the ESQF is undertaken through a collaborative and participatory approach involving government institutions, regulatory bodies, education and training providers, industry, employers, professional bodies, social partners and civil society.

The successful implementation of the ESQF requires strong partnerships and shared responsibility among stakeholders across the education, training and skills development ecosystem.

Key stakeholders include:

- Government ministries and departments;
- The Higher Education Council (ESHEC) and the Examination Council of Eswatini (ECESWA)
- Public and private education and training institutions;
- Industry and employer organisations;



- Professional councils and bodies;
- Workers' organisations and social partners;
- Development partners and regional organisations;
- Learners, parents and communities.

Industry and employers play a critical role in ensuring that qualifications remain relevant to labour market and economic development needs. Professional bodies shall support establishment of professional standards and recognition arrangements in regulated professions.

Education and training institutions are responsible for implementation of learning outcomes-based curricula, assessment systems and quality assurance mechanisms aligned to the ESQF.

The EQA must establish appropriate stakeholder engagement structures and consultation mechanisms to ensure inclusive participation, transparency and continuous improvement of the ESQF.

Implementation of the ESQF is undertaken collaboratively with ministries, regulatory authorities, quality assurance agencies, institutions, industry, professional bodies, employers and social partners.

CHAPTER 3

Structure of the Framework

3.1 Structure of the ESQF

The ESQF consists of ten qualification levels spanning general education, TVET and higher education. Seven levels are situated at undergraduate level while three are at postgraduate level. The Framework has been benchmarked against regional and international frameworks including the SADCQF and the Commonwealth Transnational Qualifications Framework.

Each level represents increasing complexity of knowledge, skills and personal attributes. Qualifications at each level are assigned generic qualification titles to support comparability and parity of esteem.

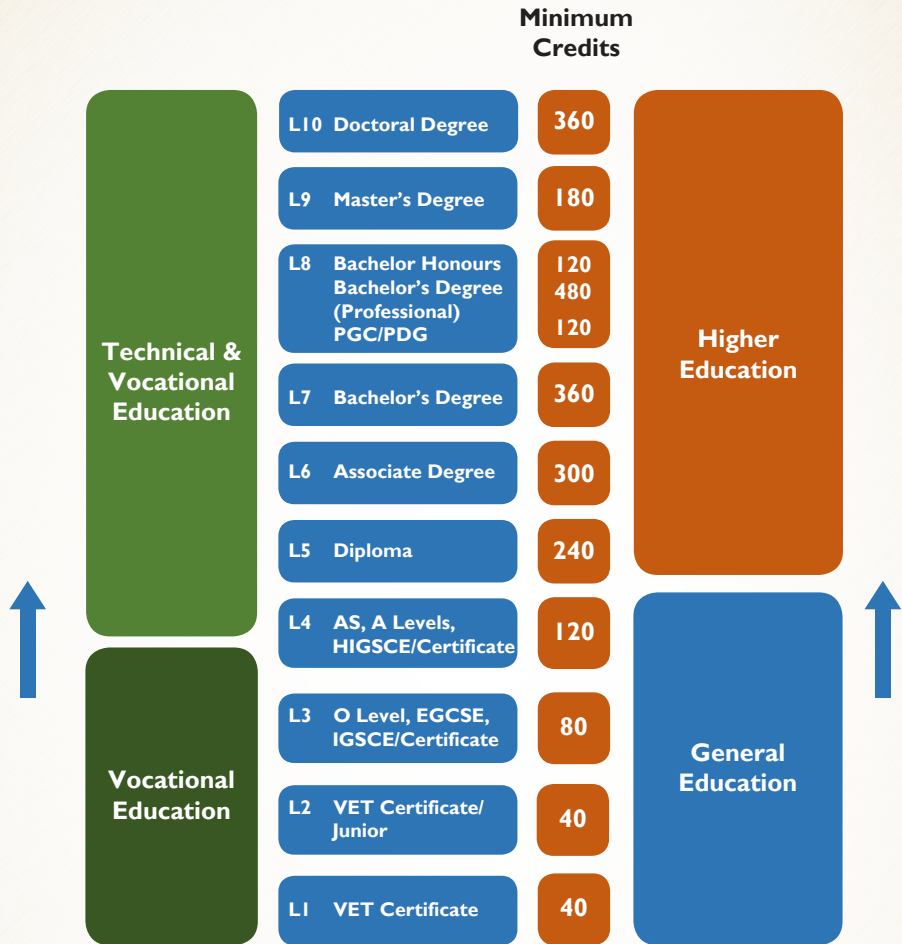
3.2 Purpose of the Level Structure

The level structure supports:

- Transparency and comparability of qualifications;
- Learner mobility and progression;
- Credit accumulation and transfer;
- Alignment of qualifications to learning outcomes;
- National, regional and international recognition.



3.3 ESQF Architecture



Each level represents the complexity of the qualifications from the most basic to the most complex incrementally from levels one to ten. Each qualification at a given level has a generic name regardless of where the qualification was obtained. Such generic titles make it possible for all qualifications that are registered on the framework to have parity of esteem.

3.4 ESQF Level Descriptors

Level descriptors are statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the ESQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that individuals at a given level should possess or be able to demonstrate on achieving the qualification. In formulating the ESQF level descriptors, the following principles have been embraced:

- Level descriptors are broad, generic, qualitative statements of learning outcomes that will be achieved at a specific level of the qualifications framework.
- Level descriptors take account of different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills and wider personal and professional competencies.
- Levels are not intrinsically related to the period of study.
- Level descriptors are intended to integrate academic, technical-vocational education and training (TVET) and professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning).
- Level descriptors are not intended to be prescriptive but rather flexible enough to provide a guideline to practitioners involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum for any field of study.
- Level descriptors are developed with the intention that the curriculum specialist will use his/her professional expertise to translate them into his/her own field of study.
- The level descriptors may be used to aid the assessment of claims for recognition of prior learning.
- Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide to locate a qualification (and its associated learning programmes) at the appropriate level on the ESQF.
- Level descriptors are formulated to help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the ESQF.

Table 1: ESQF Level Descriptors

Level 10		
Knowledge	To create a new, systematic and logical knowledge base through in-depth and original research and scholarship.	Doctoral Degree
Skills	- To apply innovative methods, technologies and interventions to solving real-world and theoretical problems; - To produce and defend independent, in depth and publishable work	
Personal Attributes	- To demonstrate independence of thought and action; - To take full responsibility for their own work; to effectively manage, supervise or oversee the work of others; - To portray confidence in communicating and leading research in their area of expertise; - To act professional within their field of work; work in ways which are reflective, critical and based on evidence.	
Level 9		
Knowledge	- To defend a position based upon advanced knowledge and understanding of a particular discipline; - To apply appropriate methods and techniques to collect new evidence, analyse existing evidence, or critique other scholarly work in a systematic way; - To advance the boundaries of knowledge in a creative way, and pioneer entrepreneurship.	Masters Degree
Skills	- To communicate and present research findings to a wider and professional audience; - To develop and defend original coherent and compelling arguments; - To design and plan rigorous and systematic projects based upon ethical principles.	
Personal Attributes	- To make autonomous and ethical decisions; to effectively manage their time and other resources; - To demonstrate initiative and innovation in a wide range of contexts; - To demonstrate creativity and initiative in their area of expertise.	

Level 8		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate a critical understanding of the relevant theories, methodologies, and methods existing at the forefront of their discipline; • To critically and systematically analyse, evaluate, and engage with new and more complex concepts that will extend and replicate knowledge; • To possess a basic knowledge of innovation and entrepreneurship.	• Professional Degree • Bachelor Honours • Post Graduate Certificate • Post Graduate Diploma
Skills	• To generate hypothesis; analyse and evaluate problems; work in teams; present and communicate research findings through the interrogation of multiple sources of knowledge; • To apply knowledge and skills to solving abstract and complex problems; to acquire and apply intermediary entrepreneurial skills.	
Personal Attributes	• To be able to assume a leadership role; • To demonstrate a basic understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship; • To be autonomous learners; • To be reflective and self-critical; • To take responsibility for their own actions and work; • To undertake professional work within their given discipline.	
Level 7		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate understanding of the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located and has knowledge of current developments in the area of study or work. • To demonstrate clear conceptualisation of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work. • To demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issue in the field of study and between different fields.	• Bachelor's Degree
Skills	• To demonstrate ability to design and manage processes, can use specialised skills to conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors with a developed ability to undertake research, development of strategic activities to inform or produce change in the area of work or study	

Level 7		
Personal Attributes	• To develop and communicate ideas, opinions and informed arguments using appropriate academic, professional or occupational discourse; • Accountable for own work, decision-making and use of resources • Limited responsibility for decisions and actions of others in varied and/or unfamiliar contexts.	
Level 6		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate acquired specialist knowledge of an area of work or study to enable the use of an individual's own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations in a field. • To demonstrates the achievement of a high level of professional knowledge and a critical understanding of theories and principles, and how that knowledge relates to other fields/ disciplines/ practices	• Associate Degree
Skills	• To demonstrates ability to use specialised skills and tools to address unfamiliar situations that involve many interacting factors using appropriate methodologies and approaches; • To design and undertake research, development of strategic activities to inform or produce change in the area of work or study; • To evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	
Personal Attributes	• To manage processes and work with a large degree of accountability for personal and group outcomes; • To clearly communicating ideas, challenges and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of relevant techniques; • To evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	
Level 5		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate an understanding of concepts, principles, fact and theories within a specified field, discipline and practise. • To apply broad theoretic and practical knowledge that is often specialised within a field. • To analyze, categorize, classify information to construct logical and coherent argument • To show awareness of the knowledge base.	• Diploma • Technician

Level 5		
Skills	• To demonstrate the ability to identify, evaluate and solve undefined, routine, new problems within a known context • To apply solutions based on relevant evidence and procedures or other forms of explanations appropriate to the field, discipline or practice, demonstrating an understanding of consequences.	
Personal Attributes	• To manage projects with limited supervision that require problem solving where there are many factors some of which can lead to unforeseen changes. • To convey ideas in a reliable, accurate, and coherent manner to peers, supervisors and clients using appropriate conventions. • To express a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement with others. • To formulate responses to abstract and concrete problems. • To demonstrate experience of operational interactions within a familiar field. • To make judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues	
Level 4		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate advanced knowledge in specialised and emerging situations to make informed judgements. • To understand key concepts, terms, rules and established principles and theories in one or more fields or disciplines.	• Advanced Subsidiary • Advanced Level • Artisan • Grade I Trade Test
Skills	• To apply strategic approaches to tasks that arise in work and using expert sources of information. • To use technology to solve existing and emerging situations.	
Personal Attributes	• To demonstrate accountability and responsibility in work/ learning situations. • To show proactivity and reliability in performance of tasks.	



Level 3		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate ability to understand and apply theoretical and technical knowledge of key concepts to perform tasks and solve problems within given parameters. • To have an understanding of solutions to a limited range of predictable problems.	• Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) • Grade 2 Trade Certificate
Skills	• To apply a range of methods, tools and materials to complete routine activities.	
Personal Attributes	• To complete tasks under moderate supervision in stable contexts. • To demonstrate ability to perform tasks in a team. • To demonstrate ability to adhere to organisational values.	
Level 2		
Knowledge	• To recall and apply basic practical and educational knowledge of a defined area of learning / work.	• Handyman/semiskilled • Basic capacity to operate in a specialised skills area • Grade 3 Trade Certificate
Skills	• To apply basic skills to execute tasks involving known routines and procedures under maximum supervision	
Personal Attributes	• To perform tasks in a well-defined and supervised environment. • To demonstrate limited autonomy in execution of tasks.	
Level 1		
Knowledge	• To recall basic knowledge in well- defined and familiar contexts.	• Eswatini Primary Certificate (EPC) • Basic literacy e.g. learners who have completed Sebenta • Other basic foundation programmes incorporating basic literacy and numeracy
Skills	• To apply numeracy and literacy skills to carry out tasks.	
Personal Attributes	• To demonstrate ability to understand, follow instructions and be able to function as a team member in learning and work environment.	

CHAPTER 4

Qualification Categories, Learning outcomes and Credits

4.1 Qualification Titles

Three broad types of qualifications are able to be placed on the ESQF:

- Degrees
- Diplomas
- Certificates

The qualification types are used to encourage flexibility and the accurate assignment to a level. Each qualification on the ESQF describes what a learner needs to know or what they must be able to do. The qualification titles will allow for the comparability and easy understanding of qualifications, as well as the improved international recognition of qualifications.

Each qualification on the ESQF will have a statement of learning outcomes. This includes statements about:

- What the qualification represents in terms of the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes; and
- The components of the qualification which, in their combination, make up the complete qualification.

All qualifications registered on the ESQF shall be quality assured and aligned to approved ESQF levels and level descriptors in accordance with national policies, standards and criteria coordinated by the Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) in collaboration with relevant quality assurance bodies.

4.1.1 Certificate

Certificates may be used in a wide range of contexts across all levels up to and including Level 7, and are often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates at ESQF Levels 1 and 2 have a minimum credit requirement of 40 credits. The ESQF Level 4 certificate has a minimum credit



requirement of 120 credits. Entry to the ESQF Level 4 is normally from a Secondary Certificate or from the completion of a relevant qualification from at least Level 3. ESQF Level 4 certificate may be used in a wide range of contexts and is often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed graduate or post-graduate.

4.1.2 Diploma

A Diploma is a qualification that commonly has a wider theoretical base than a certificate and more specialised, technical, professional or managerial competencies. Diplomas often prepare learners for self-directed application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. These qualifications often build on prior qualifications or experience and recognise capacity for initiative and judgment across a broad range of educational and vocational areas, and in technical, professional, and/or management roles. A Diploma must have at least 240 credits contributing to the qualification at Level 5. Diploma awarded at Level 6 may be termed advanced or higher. Diplomas awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed Graduate or Postgraduate.

4.1.3 Associate Degree or Foundation Degree

An Associate or Foundation Degree is a programme designed to recognise and facilitate students' 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 and Foundation Degree will have at least 300 credits of which at least 90 credits will match the Level 6 descriptor.

4.1.4 Bachelor's Degree

A Bachelor's Degree is a systematic, research-based, coherent, introduction to the knowledge, ideas, principles, concepts, research methods and to the analytical and problem-solving techniques of a recognised major subject or subjects. A programme leading to this qualification usually involves major studies in which significant knowledge is available. Programme content is taken to a significant depth and progressively developed to a high level that can provide a basis for post-

graduate study and professional careers. A Bachelor Degree requires a minimum of 360 credits. Successful completion of L5 and L6 can contribute a maximum of 120 and 240 credits respectively towards achieving a L7 qualification. A programme of study leading to a Bachelor Degree qualification builds upon prior study, work or experience and is open to those who have met the specified entrance requirements.

4.1.5 Bachelor's Degree with Honours / Professional Degree

A Bachelor's Degree with Honours may be awarded to recognise advanced or distinguished study of a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree. This may occur by recognising outstanding achievement in a 480 credit (or more) Bachelor's Degree especially in relation to work of a research nature (typically at Level 8); or achieving at least 120 credits at level 8 following a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree (either as part of an integrated Honours degree or as a separate qualification).

4.1.6 Master's Degree

A Master's Degree is normally designed to extend the principal subject or subjects of the qualifying degree or may build on relevant knowledge and skills derived from advanced occupational experience. A Master's Degree contains a significant element of supervised research, normally embodied in a thesis, dissertation or substantial research paper. The Master's Degree requires a minimum of 240 credits, with at least 120 matching the Level 9 descriptor. Where the Master's Degree builds upon a four year (or longer) Bachelor's Degree, it can be fewer than 240 credits, but no fewer than 180 credits. Masters Degrees usually build on undergraduate degrees, Bachelor with Honours Degrees or Postgraduate Diplomas. Masters Degrees also build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind.

Providers of courses leading to Master's Degrees are responsible for establishing entry requirements. Nevertheless, the minimum entry qualification for a 180 to 240 credit Master's Degree is normally a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent. For a Master's Degree of fewer than 240 credits, the minimum entry qualification is normally a Bachelor's Degree with Honours or a Postgraduate Diploma. Admission as a candidate for a Master's Degree is based on the evaluation of documentary evidence (including the academic record) of the applicant's ability to undertake postgraduate



study in a specialist field of enquiry or professional practice. The candidate must have attained, through formal study, professional or other experience, a high order of knowledge about the principal subject(s), and have demonstrated interest in, and an aptitude for, scholarship.

A person who holds a Bachelor's Degree may be able to enroll for a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma or Master's Degree. An applicant who holds either a Bachelor's Degree with Honours, or a Postgraduate Certificate, or Diploma may be exempted from all or some of the taught courses. A person who holds a Master's Degree which includes a substantial component of research may be considered for admission to a programme of advanced study and/or original research leading to a Doctoral Degree.

4.1.7 Doctoral Degree

The Doctoral Degree recognises a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing knowledge. A Doctoral Degree is a qualification that is at a significantly higher level than the Master's Degree, reflecting, independent, scholarly work. The Doctoral programme will be equivalent to a minimum of 3 years of full-time study, or 360 credits matching the Level 10 descriptor.

Typical Doctoral programs and entry pathways are:

- *The research doctorate*, which is primarily achieved through supervised research, with entry from a research or part-research Master's Degree, or a Bachelor with Honours Degree (First or Second Class, upper division); and
- *The professional doctorate*, which may be undertaken through varying combinations of coursework and research, with entry from a combined research and coursework Master's Degree, a Bachelor with Honours Degree (First or Second Class, upper division) or equivalent, and requires significant professional practice either prior to and/or as part of the program.

4.2 Learning Outcome

A learning outcome is a statement on what a learner should understand and can do upon completion of a period of study. Learning outcomes shall form the basis

for qualification design, curriculum development, assessment, credit allocation, recognition of prior learning and qualifications comparability within the ESQF.

4.3 Credits

A credit is a “currency” providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. It is awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. In most national and regional systems and notably within SADC and the Commonwealth one credit equates 10 notional hours of learning at the appropriate level.

4.3.1 Credit Values

Credit values are commonly used as an accepted mechanism that recognises the quantum of learning for a qualification. This mechanism acts as a form of currency in that it is the medium of exchange when learners transfer their attainment from one qualification to another under ‘credit’ transfer arrangements. There is a growing acceptance of an international credit value where one credit represents about 10 hours of notional learning time. The national credit system shall support learner mobility, articulation, accumulation and transfer of credits within and across education and training sectors.

4.3.2 Scope of Learning

Learning time should include all relevant learning activities that contribute to the attainment of the outcomes of learning. Such activities could include:

- Formal, directed learning including classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials
- Practical work in laboratories or at other locations
- Information retrieval, e.g. from libraries or through the Web
- Self-directed study, such as private study, revision, remedial work
- Work-based activities that lead to formal assessment
- Practice – gaining, applying and refining skills
- Undertaking all forms of assessment, and
- Counselling, mentoring, reflection.



4.2.3 Notional Learning

Learning time is notional as it is not linked to any one individual learner. A learner who achieves the required performances in more time than anticipated for the 'average learner' will not receive more credits – they will only receive that number of credits deemed appropriate by the qualification developer or national standard setter. Similarly, a learner who achieves the requirements in less time than the average learner will not be awarded less credit – they will receive the stated credits.

4.3 Recognition of Prior Learning

Specific arrangements will be made for the assessment and accreditation of skills and competencies people acquired outside of the school system. People can acquire skills and competences in different ways, by following a learning programme, but also through experience in their work and daily life. For those who feel that they master skills and can demonstrate competencies in a certain field it should be possible that they can come forward and require to be assessed against the standards as described in the qualifications framework.

CHAPTER 5

Quality Assurance and the ESQF

5.1 Background

The ESQF is one essential component for assuring the quality of Education, Training and skills development in Eswatini. Quality assurance entails a system of continuously assessing quality of education, training and skills development to ensure credibility of graduates. The Eswatini Qualifications Framework and quality assurance system create rich, diverse and lifelong opportunities for the individual citizen by preparing citizens for work in an increasingly knowledge-based, technology-driven and skills dependant labour market that help Eswatini to deliver jobs and growth in a rapidly changing and highly competitive global environment.

It is essential that the quality assurance system is regulated, monitored and continuously improved. The implementation of quality assurance within the ESQF shall be undertaken collaboratively by the Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA), relevant regulatory authorities and quality assurance agencies within their respective mandates.

The Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC) shall exercise responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in accordance with applicable legislation and policies.

5.2 The Components of Quality Assurance

The three key components for assuring the quality of the educational and training provision are level descriptors, subject standards or benchmarks and programme specifications.

Level descriptors are generic and thus are high level descriptions of what outcomes are expected on achieving a given qualification. The ESQF provides these high-level generic descriptors for each qualification level (see Chapter 3). It is important that providers, whether national, regional or international, can demonstrate that their



qualifications satisfy these generic descriptions thus ensuring a level of equivalence within and between levels. A L7 qualification, for example, should be equivalent regardless of the provider or their location.

Subject standards or benchmarks shall be developed, implemented and reviewed by relevant quality assurance and regulatory bodies in collaboration with the Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) and stakeholders. Such standards shall take cognisance of national priorities, labour market needs, regional frameworks and international good practice. They should also take cognisance of regional or international subject standards. Whilst level descriptors describe what outcomes are expected of a qualification level (e.g. Bachelor degree attributes), subject standards describe the intended learning outcomes of a subject or domain within a qualification. For example, a subject standard would describe a common set of learning outcomes expected of a student studying for a Chemistry degree. Subject standards or benchmark statements are necessary to ensure that there is compatibility or equivalence at the subject level within a qualification (i.e. a chemistry graduate from one institution should be equivalent to a chemistry graduate from another institution).

Programme specifications are at the next level of granularity. These are written by each provider or an accredited third party for each of the programmes it offers. The programme specifications set out the particular characteristics of the programme and draw upon both the generic expectations of the qualification framework and the specifics of any relevant benchmark statement(s). Programme specifications not only address what must be taught but how it will be taught. It is in the area of teaching and learning methods that institutions can exercise considerable freedom and flexibility to reflect their resources, students' and teachers' abilities.

5.3 Accreditation, Validation and QA Compliance

For the ESQF to be effective; and to assure and enhance the quality of the Kingdom's education and training providers, it requires evidence that the framework levels, subject standards and programme specifications are valid, providers are accredited, and that all parties are in compliance with the required QA policies and procedures.

Validation is a QA process to ensure that qualifications, subject standards and programme specifications are consistent, accurate, and relevant. Most validation processes in QA involve some form of internal or external review/consultation. For example, to ensure the validity of the level descriptors, drafts were drawn up following stakeholder consultations and benchmarking activities, and have been written and reviewed by internal experts. A similar process will be followed for subject standards and programme specifications.

Accreditation is a process to ensure that education and training providers meet a set of pre-specified quality standards. It is a judgment about the quality of the provider or institution. An accredited provider is then licenced, usually for a fixed period, to provide training and education at a specified qualification level (e.g. universities providing degree programmes).

Compliance is a process of demonstrating that the required QA policies and procedures exist and are being correctly followed. The process usually involves reviews of documentation, interviews with key stakeholders, and observation of practices (e.g. teaching). Providers, who are not compliant, can lose their accreditation.

The ESQF is, therefore, the key starting point and driver for all education and training programmes. It provides an external reference point when considering a provider's approach to the management and security of academic standards of its awards and the quality of its provision.

The Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) shall coordinate implementation of the ESQF across all education and training sectors to ensure consistency in qualifications design, learning outcomes, level alignment, quality assurance, credit systems, articulation pathways and recognition arrangements.



CHAPTER 6

ESQF Study Fields and Subfields

6.1 General Provisions

The Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) shall adopt a nationally coordinated classification system for study fields and subfields to support consistency, comparability and organisation of qualifications across the education, training and skills development sector.

The classification of qualifications according to study fields and subfields shall be aligned with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Fields of Education and Training framework.

The adoption of internationally recognised study fields and subfields shall strengthen national data management, qualifications comparability, education planning, labour market analysis and international reporting obligations.

6.2 Purpose of Study Fields and Subfields

The ESQF study fields and subfields shall provide a standardized framework for organizing qualifications according to disciplines, occupational domains and areas of learning.

The classification system shall support:

- Consistency in registration and classification of qualifications;
- Comparability of qualifications nationally, regionally and internationally;
- Alignment of qualifications with labour market sectors and occupational pathways;
- Education and labour market planning;
- National, regional and international statistical reporting;
- Research, policy development and skills forecasting;
- Learner guidance and career pathway development.

The study fields and subfields shall apply across general education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), higher education, occupational qualifications, professional qualifications and emerging forms of learning including micro-credentials.

6.3 Alignment with UNESCO ISCED

The ESQF study fields and subfields shall be aligned with the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-F) Fields of Education and Training framework.

The ISCED classification system provides internationally recognised categories for organising education and training programmes and qualifications according to the subject matter and content of learning.

Alignment with UNESCO ISCED shall:

- Enhance international comparability and recognition of qualifications;
- Facilitate regional and continental qualifications alignment initiatives;
- Support mobility of learners, graduates and workers;
- Improve reliability of education statistics and reporting;
- Strengthen integration of the ESQF into regional and global qualifications systems.

The EQA shall periodically review the ESQF study fields and subfields to ensure continued alignment with international developments, emerging disciplines and national development priorities.

6.4 Registration of Qualifications According to Study Fields and Subfields

All qualifications registered on the ESQF shall be classified according to approved study fields and subfields.

The registration process shall ensure that qualifications are aligned to:

- Appropriate ESQF levels;
- Relevant study fields and subfields;
- Approved learning outcomes and credit requirements;
- National quality assurance requirements.



Qualifications shall therefore be identified not only by level and qualification type, but also by their respective field and subfield of study.

This classification shall support:

- Efficient organisation of qualifications within the National Qualifications Register;
- Improved qualifications search and verification systems;
- Tracking of skills supply across sectors;
- Mapping of qualifications against labour market needs and occupational classifications;
- Harmonization of qualifications across institutions and sectors.

6.5 Development and Maintenance of Study Fields and Subfields

The Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) shall coordinate the development, implementation and maintenance of national study fields and subfields within the ESQF.

In undertaking this function, the EQA shall collaborate with:

- Government ministries and departments;
- Regulatory and quality assurance bodies;
- Education and training institutions;
- Industry and professional bodies;
- National statistics agencies;
- Regional and international partners.

The EQA shall develop operational guidelines and classification manuals to support consistent application of study fields and subfields across institutions and sectors.

The study fields and subfields shall be reviewed periodically to:

- Respond to emerging disciplines and technologies;
- Address changing labour market demands;
- Support national development priorities;
- Ensure continued alignment with UNESCO ISCED revisions and international good practice.

6.6 Application of Study Fields and Subfields in National Planning

The classification of qualifications according to study fields and subfields shall support national education and skills planning.

This shall include support for:

- Human capital development planning;
- Labour market intelligence systems;
- Graduate tracer studies;
- Skills forecasting and anticipation;
- Resource allocation and policy planning;
- Monitoring of participation trends across disciplines and sectors.

The study fields and subfields framework shall therefore contribute to evidence-based policy formulation and strengthen alignment between education, training and national socio-economic development priorities.

CHAPTER 7

Strategic Reforms across the Framework

7.1 Micro-Credentials and Digital Credentials

The ESQF shall provide for the recognition, quality assurance and registration of micro-credentials, short learning programmes, digital badges and other forms of modular learning.

Micro-credentials shall:

- (a) Be aligned to ESQF levels and learning outcomes;
- (b) Be quality assured in accordance with national standards;
- (c) Support lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling;
- (d) Be capable of accumulation towards larger qualifications where applicable;
- (e) Respond to labour market and industry needs.

The EQA shall develop standards and guidelines for the registration and recognition of micro-credentials and digital learning achievements.

7.2 Occupational Qualifications and Industry Alignment

The ESQF shall support development and recognition of occupational qualifications and industry-responsive skills pathways aligned with national economic priorities.

Occupational qualifications shall:

- (a) Be developed in collaboration with industry and professional bodies;
- (b) Promote employability, entrepreneurship and productivity;
- (c) Support apprenticeships, work-integrated learning and dual training systems;
- (d) Facilitate skills recognition within formal and informal sectors;
- (e) Promote articulation between occupational, vocational and academic pathways.

7.3 Digital Transformation of the ESQF

The implementation of the ESQF shall be supported by integrated digital systems to enhance efficiency, transparency, qualifications verification and learner mobility.

Digital transformation initiatives shall include:

- (a) National learner records databases;
- (b) Digital qualifications registers;
- (c) Electronic qualifications verification systems;
- (d) Secure digital certification and authentication technologies;
- (e) Data analytics to support education planning and labour market responsiveness.

7.4 Internationalisation and Regional Alignment

The ESQF shall promote regional, continental and international comparability and recognition of qualifications.

The ESQF shall align with:

- (a) The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF);
- (b) The African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF);
- (c) UNESCO recognition conventions including the Addis Convention and Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education;
- (d) Relevant international qualifications and quality assurance frameworks.

The ESQF shall facilitate learner, graduate and labour mobility within the region and internationally.

7.5 National Qualifications Register

The EQA shall maintain a National Qualifications Register containing:

- (a) Registered qualifications;
- (b) Registered education and training providers;
- (c) Qualification status and level information;
- (d) Accreditation and recognition information;
- (e) Articulation and progression pathways.

The National Qualifications Register shall be publicly accessible subject to applicable laws and policies.

7.6 Labour Market Responsiveness and Skills Intelligence

The ESQF shall support national human capital development and labour market responsiveness through continuous engagement with industry, employers and social partners.

This shall include:

- (a) Labour market intelligence systems;
- (b) Graduate tracer studies;
- (c) Skills forecasting and anticipation mechanisms;
- (d) Periodic qualifications review processes;
- (e) Employer participation in qualifications and standards development

7.7 Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility

The ESQF shall promote equitable access to education, training and qualifications opportunities for all learners, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

Implementation of the ESQF shall support:

- (a) Inclusive education principles;
- (b) Flexible learning pathways;
- (c) Gender equity;
- (d) Access for persons with disabilities;
- (e) Adult and lifelong learning opportunities;
- (f) Recognition of diverse learning contexts and experiences

7.8 TVET, Entrepreneurship and Applied Learning

The ESQF shall promote parity of esteem between academic, technical, vocational and occupational qualifications.

The framework shall support:

- (a) Technical and vocational education and training (TVET);
- (b) Entrepreneurship education and innovation;
- (c) Work-integrated learning and experiential learning;
- (d) Apprenticeships and internships;
- (e) Industry-based learning and competence development.

The ESQF shall support national industrialisation, economic diversification and sustainable development objectives through development of relevant qualifications and skills pathways.

7.9 Implementation, Monitoring and Review

Implementation of the ESQF shall be guided by a national implementation strategy coordinated by the EQA in collaboration with stakeholders.

The implementation strategy shall include:

- (a) Institutional capacity development;
- (b) Stakeholder engagement mechanisms;
- (c) Financing and resource mobilisation strategies;
- (d) Public awareness and advocacy programmes;
- (e) Monitoring and evaluation frameworks;
- (f) Periodic policy and framework reviews;
- (g) Performance indicators and reporting mechanisms.

The ESQF shall be reviewed periodically to ensure responsiveness to national development priorities, labour market needs and international developments.



Notes



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