

Summary of the key themes emerging from NZQA's consultation on proposed changes to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)

NZQA received 64 responses to the consultation on proposed changes to the NZQF, comprising:

- 26 responses from the Private Training Establishment (PTE) sector
- Nine from the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP) sector
- Seven from the Industry Training Organisation (ITO) sector
- Five from the University sector
- Three from the secondary schooling sector
- One from the Wānanga sector
- Four from other organisation types
- Nine from individuals.

Feedback on proposal 1: We proposed to include a wider range of education products on the NZQF

Our rationale

Recognising a wider range of other education products on the NZQF could assist learners to make more informed choices, assist employers to recognise specialist skill sets, encourage life-long learning and ensure that employees have the skills and attributes to meet the needs of the future workforce.

Feedback

Of the 61 respondents to this proposal, the majority (66 per cent) strongly supported or somewhat supported greater flexibility in the range of quality assured educational products which could be listed on the NZQF. Feedback included that the proposal would promote a wider range of choice, flexibility and employment opportunities and better reflect the contemporary learning environment.

There was a strong theme around the importance of NZQA's quality assurance processes if this proposal went ahead. In general, there was support for including quality assured micro-credentials, training schemes and assessment standards as listed on the Directory of Assessment Standards on the NZQF. There was limited support for including international and regional qualifications.

Those who did not support this proposal (26 per cent strongly opposed or were somewhat opposed) were concerned about the risk of proliferation and confusion. Some respondents were concerned that the proposal would not help learners make good choices e.g. it could lead to piecemeal learning rather than full qualifications.

Respondents did not in general support including non-NZQA quality assured products on the NZQF. Comments included that this would undermine the regulated educational sector and would damage New Zealand's international reputation for high quality education.

Feedback on proposal 2: We proposed to more explicitly embed transferable competencies into the NZQF (i.e. critical thinking, communication, collaboration and citizenship)

Our rationale

The impact of digitalisation and automation means that the workforce needs to have the skills, competencies and capabilities to engage in meaningful work throughout their careers and lives.

Employers, iwi and other stakeholders want to ensure that the future workforce meets their needs. Qualifications and other education products need to be relevant, fit-for-purpose and responsive. While this includes technical skills, employers also value employees who can communicate well, take initiative and solve problems.

Feedback

Of the 58 respondents to this proposal, 57 per cent strongly or somewhat supported it. Their feedback included comments on the relevancy of the proposed competencies in the 21st century and in a globally connected world (although some respondents felt the rationale was too focused on employment rather than life-long learning and societal value).

Some respondents supported the proposal in principle but commented that some of these competencies are already included in the knowledge and skills descriptors, although not necessarily systematically. Others thought that the proposed competencies could better align with other competencies in current use e.g. in the New Zealand Curriculum, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and the Employability Skills Framework.

There was some concern about the proposed 'citizenship' competency, with respondents referring to practicalities and unintended consequences. Some respondents suggested that it could be confused with legal and political status; others that it reflects societal values that should not have a place on a qualifications framework. Some respondents commented that it could imply that a level 8 graduate was, for example, a 'better' citizen than someone with a level 4 qualification. Some respondents commented that there is a place for purely technical qualifications.

Of those who did not support the proposal (36 per cent strongly or somewhat opposed it), a range of concerns were mentioned. Some respondents said that the competencies should not be described by level of the NZQF as there isn't necessarily a clear hierarchy of competencies associated with higher level learning (e.g. a skilled trades person with a level 4 qualification should be as least as skilled in collaboration as a Bachelor of Arts Economics graduate). Some respondents were concerned about assessment (e.g. the competencies may be difficult to assess objectively). Others were concerned about the impact on qualification and programme developers, identifying that this could require significant capability building in the sector.

One respondent commented that the proposal would result in the NZQF having an inappropriate role in curriculum design. They suggested that NZQA should focus instead on ensuring that TEOs focus on the needs of stakeholders through the criteria for maintaining programme approval and accreditation.

There was mixed support for renaming the current 'application' descriptor 'competencies'. Of 55 respondents, 44 per cent supported the proposal and 40 per cent did not. Those who supported it noted that this is a global trend. The ITO sector did not support this aspect of the proposal, commenting that the term 'application' is particularly important in vocational contexts.

Feedback on proposal 3: We proposed to address some technical issues in the NZQF

Our rationale

We did not consult on explicit proposals for each of the identified technical issues. We also sought feedback on our approach and whether we had missed any issues.

Feedback

39 respondents commented on the overall proposal. The feedback on each specific issue is set out below.

- Consider the level of trades qualifications on the NZQF, and the extent to which differences in parity of esteem are driven by the architecture of the NZQF or other considerations

The 10 respondents who commented on this were concerned that vocational qualifications are at the lower levels of the NZQF (most are at level 4 or below), particularly compared to other jurisdictions. They were also concerned about parity of esteem issues. Feedback included that the NZQF must ensure that all skills are recognised and valued. Respondents generally agreed that revising the level and qualification descriptors would help vocational qualification developers to develop qualifications that can be listed at higher levels on the NZQF.

One respondent suggested the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework as a useful model. Other suggestions also included subsets or streams within the NZQF, identifying the different pathways.

Some respondents commented that there are several drivers of the parity of esteem issues, including broader societal values, and/or policy and funding issues¹.

- Clarify the utility of Level 7 Diplomas and consider removing them as a qualification type

18 people commented on this issue. 12 respondents (mainly PTEs) did not agree that the Level 7 Diploma should be removed as a qualification type. They commented that their qualification provides a pathway from level 5 in disciplines that are highly technical, practical and applied. They also commented that their qualification meets a well-defined industry need in areas where a degree is not required (e.g. marine engineering, air traffic control, dance). Some respondents were concerned that by removing the qualification type, their programmes would need to meet the requirements for degrees, despite there being no industry need for their qualification to be 'taught mainly by people engaged in research'².

Some respondents also noted that removing this qualification type would have a negative impact on workplace focused education and training.

Four respondents supported the proposal, commenting that they did not see the value of this qualification type.

- Clarify the qualification definitions for Level 8 Bachelor Honour degrees

Fewer respondents commented on this specifically. One respondent noted that there was an urgent need to address the issue, but it is compounded by other factors, such as student loans and allowances. Another considered that addressing the level 8 and qualification type descriptors would help address the issue.

- Clarify level 7 to include degree apprenticeships

Eight respondents commented on this proposal. Five were in favour of the approach and two did not support it (one was unsure). Those who supported the proposal were in favour of increasing the availability of work-based programmes of study and vocational pathways. Those who did not support it were concerned that a degree apprenticeship qualification may not meet the requirements of the Education Act and that if it resulted in two distinct types of degrees on the NZQF, it would impact on international recognition arrangements.

- Update the level descriptors

There was clear support for updating the level and qualification descriptors.

¹ The funding determination for the Industry Training Fund specifies that a maximum of 10 per cent of the fund can be allocated to training at level 5 and above on the NZQF.

² A requirement for degrees, under Section 253B(3)(a) of the Education Act

➤ Other technical issues that could be addressed

25 respondents identified other technical issues that could be considered in the review. Their suggestions included:

- clarifying the proportion of credits that must be at a particular level in some qualifications e.g. Master's Degrees
- clarifying the three different routes to a Master's Degree
- reviewing the purpose of Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas
- reviewing the qualification type naming conventions in the NZQF i.e. certificates are available from level 1 to level 6 and that Diplomas are available from level 5 to level 7
- that the purpose and outcome statements of some qualification types needed to be strengthened
- literacy and numeracy standards needed to be more explicit.

Feedback on proposal 4: We proposed to make the NZQF easier to use and more relevant to all stakeholders

Our rationale

Many stakeholders, particularly learners, parents, employers, iwi and communities, only engage with the NZQF through intermediaries such as secondary schools and tertiary education providers. We proposed to redesign the NZQF so that it is more reflective of the values underpinning it and more accessible to the full range of stakeholders.

Feedback

44 respondents agreed that the usability and accessibility of the NZQF could be improved, particularly for learners. There were a wide range of suggestions including support for the fan design used in the Irish Qualifications Framework and for segmented customer-focussed interactive versions of the NZQF. Other suggestions included social media and mobile applications, making more explicit links between qualifications and regulatory requirements and the international comparability of qualifications. Respondents emphasised that NZQA needs to work with the sector on the redesign and that the re-design needs a focus on the end-user (the learner).

35 respondents commented on the proposal to ensure that the NZQF better reflects *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and Mātauranga Māori. Respondents generally agreed that the NZQF is mono-cultural in its presentation and supported the suggested approach.

Two respondents suggested that the NZQF could do more to position NCEA as New Zealand's foundational qualification.