

Volume of Learning: An Explanation

Volume of learning defined

The volume of learning is defined in the AQF as follows:

The volume of learning is a dimension of the complexity of a qualification. It is used with the level criteria and qualification type descriptor to determine the depth and breadth of the learning outcomes of a qualification. The volume of learning identifies the notional duration of all activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes specified for a particular AQF qualification type. It is expressed in equivalent full-time years.

Volume of learning explained

The volume of learning, and the breadth and depth of the knowledge, skills and application of the knowledge and skills determined for a qualification, define the complexity of the qualification.

The volume of learning determined for a qualification must fall within the range provided in the descriptor for the qualification type.

The concept of 'typically' used to describe the volume of learning is intended to provide some flexibility in relation to pathways into and from AQF qualifications that are incorporated into the design of the qualification. It is not intended as justification for not applying the requirement.

Volume of learning applied

It is the responsibility of organisations developing and/or accrediting qualifications to exercise professional judgment to ensure that the design of programs of learning leading to qualifications enables students to achieve the learning outcomes for both the qualification type and the discipline. Decisions about design of qualifications must take into account students' likelihood of successfully achieving qualification outcomes and also must ensure that integrity of qualification outcomes is maintained. Those developing and/or accrediting qualifications should be able to provide a pedagogical rationale to justify a decision about the volume of learning.

The volume of learning allocated to a qualification should include all teaching, learning and assessment activities that are required to be undertaken by the typical student to achieve the learning outcomes. These activities may include some or all of the following: guided learning (such as classes, lectures, tutorials, on-line study or self-paced study guides), individual study, research, learning activities in the workplace and assessment activities.

The teaching, learning and assessment activities are usually measured in equivalent full time years. The generally accepted length of a full time year, used for educational participation, is 1200 hours.

The volume of learning allocated in the design of a qualification may vary depending upon:

- the level of the previous qualification required for entry
- whether the purpose of the qualification is for deepening or broadening of knowledge and skills, or
- whether the qualification leads to professional outcomes or is generalist in purpose.

It would be usual for a greater volume of learning to be allocated to qualifications designed to:

- build on a previous qualification in a different discipline regardless of the level of the previous qualification,
- build on a qualification from any lower level, or
- require workplace, clinical or professional practice.

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Qualifications in the same discipline designed to deepen existing knowledge and skills and / or which specify higher level entry requirement are likely to require a lesser volume of learning to achieve the learning outcomes. In the Masters Degree (Research) and Masters Degree (Coursework) for example, a typical volume of learning for deepening purposes comprises: 1½ years following a level 7 qualification or 1 year following a level 8 qualification; for broadening purposes: 2 years following a level 7 qualification or 1½ years following a level 8 qualification.

If a lesser volume of learning is allocated to a qualification, the components of the program of learning must be predominately or entirely at the level of the qualification type.

If credit - such as through articulation arrangements - contributes to the volume of learning, the learning outcomes for the qualification must be achievable despite the reduced volume of learning.

Volume of learning applied in delivery

The duration of the delivery of the qualification may vary from the volume of learning specified for the qualification. Providers may offer the qualification in more or less time than the specified volume of learning, provided that delivery arrangements give students sufficient opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes for the qualification type, level and discipline.

Students may be fast-tracked through the qualification, for example by providers offering three semesters per year, longer study hours in the traditional two semester model, or intensive periods of study. Conversely, some cohorts of students may be offered a longer duration of delivery to support their successful achievement of the qualification outcomes. Students may be offered more self-paced methodologies, including online delivery and workplace delivery, which will vary the duration required to achieve the learning outcomes. The duration may be reduced for individual students if credit towards the qualification is given in the form of recognition of prior learning, advanced standing or credit transfer.

Provider decisions about the duration of the delivery of a qualification must take into account the students' likelihood of successfully achieving the learning outcomes and ensure that the integrity of the qualification outcomes is maintained. If the duration of delivery is substantially different from the volume of learning specified by the qualification type specification, providers should be able to provide pedagogical rationale to support the variation.

See also

AQF explanation on proportion of components of a qualification at a level

AQF explanation on clustered qualifications

AQF explanation on discipline

AQF explanation on credit transfer

AQF explanation on articulation

AQF explanation on recognition of prior learning