Linking Recognition Practices and National Qualifications Frameworks

Edited by Madhu Singh and Ruud Duvekot

International benchmarking of experiences and strategies on the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning

UNESCO
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UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, Germany

CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACBS Academic Credit Bank System
ADEA Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AE Adult Education
AIU Association of Indian Universities
AMU Adult Vocational Training Programme (Denmark)
ANQ National Agency for Qualifications (Portugal)
ANQF Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework
APACC Asia Pacific Accreditation and Certification Commission
APEL Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
BEP Vocational Studies Diploma (brevet d'études professionnelles)
BP Professional Diploma (brevet professionnel)
BT Technical Diploma (brevet de technicien)
BTS Higher Technical Diploma (brevet de technicien supérieur)
CAP Professional Aptitude Certificate (certificat d'aptitude professionnelle)
CARICOM Caribbean Community
CBSE Central Board of Secondary Education
CBT Competency Based Training
CBT Computer Based Test
CEDEFOP European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CFPA Adult Vocational Training Certificate (certificat de formation professionnelle des adultes)
CIRIUS National Agency for Internationalization of Education and Training (Denmark)
CISCE Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination
COBSE Council of the Boards of School Education
COL Commonwealth of Learning
CONOCER National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (Mexico)
COTVET Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Ghana)
CPSC Colombo Plan Staff College
CQP Certificates of Professional Qualification (Certificats de qualification professionnelle)
DA The Federation of Employers (Denmark)
DACUM Developing a Curriculum
DAHE Department of Adult and Higher education
DEF Development Employment Fund
DGAIR General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation and Revalidation (Mexico)
DUT Degree-level training
EFA Education for All
EHEA European Higher Education Area
EQF European Qualifications Framework
ESF European Social Fund
ETF European Training Foundation
EVA Danish Evaluation Institute
EVC   Recognition of Acquired Competencies (The Netherlands)
FE Formal Education
FPSPP Joint Fund for Career Security (Fonds paritaire de sécurisation des parcours professionnels)

FTF Confederation of Danish Professionals
GES Ghana Education Service
GHA Gambia Hotel Association
GoA Government of Afghanistan
GSQF Gambia Skills Qualification Framework
GTTI Gambia Technical Training Institute
GVU Basic Adult Training Programme (Denmark)
HAVO-VWO Vocational education levels (Netherlands)
HE Higher Education
HRD Human Resources Department (Korea)
HSP Home Schooling Program
ICT Information and Communication Technology
IDB Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
IGNOU Indira Gandhi National Open University
IKV in AMU Individual competence evaluation within vocational training (Denmark)
IS Informal Sector
ITAB Industry Training Advisory Board (Ghana)
ITAC Industry Trade Advisory Committee
ITC Industrial Training College
ITI Industrial Training Institute
KQF Korean Qualification Framework
KSS Korean Skill Standards
LB Led Body
LO Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
MBO Intermediate Vocational Education (Netherlands)
MES Mauritius Examinations Syndicate
MES Modular Employable Skills
MHRD Ministry of Human Resource Development (India)
MIH Mauritius Institute of Health
MITD Mauritius Institute of Training and Development
MoE Ministry of Education (Jordan)
MoLE Ministry of Labour and Employment (India)
MQA Mauritius Qualifications Authority
MQF Malaysian Qualifications Framework / Mexican Qualifications Framework
NAAL Norwegian Association for Adult Learning
NAB National Accreditation Board (Ghana)
NAWEC National Water and Electricity Company
NCQ National Catalogue of Qualifications
NSCS National System of Competency Standards (Mexico)
NCTE National Council on Tertiary Education (Ghana)
NFCED Non-formal & Continuing Education Division
NFE Non-formal Education
NILE National Institute for Lifelong Education
NLRD National Learners' Records Database

NPE National Policy on Education
NQF National Qualifications Framework
NQS National Qualifications System
NSDP National Skills Development Program
NSK Czech National Qualifications Framework
NSO National Occupations System
NTA National Training Authority
NTQAC National Training Quality Assurance Committee
NTVETQF National TVET Qualifications Framework (Ghana)
NTVETQFC National TVET Qualifications Framework Committee
NUOV National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education
NVR National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning
NVTI National Vocational Training Institute (Ghana)
NVQF National Vocational Qualifications Frameworks (United Kingdom)
NZQA New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZQF New Zealand Qualifications Framework
PEM Participatory Education Methodology
PLA Peer Learning Activities
PP Pre-Primary
PRA Learning Reflexive Portfolio
PRA Participatory Rapid Assessment
ROC Dutch Regional Training Centre
RPL Recognition of Prior Learning
RUB Royal University of Bhutan
RVA Recognition, Validation and Accreditation
RVCC Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences
SAQA South African Qualifications Authority
SC Sector Councils
SCKK Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (Denmark)
SD Scholarships Division
SD Sustainable Development
SDF Skills Development Framework
SEP Mexican Secretariat of Public Education
SSA Sub-Saharan Africa
SWOT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TEC Tertiary Education Commission
TED Tertiary Education Division
TEO Tertiary Education Organisation
TQF Transnational Qualifications Framework
TVET Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VAE Validation of Acquired Experience (Validation des acquis de l'expérience, France)
VET Vocational Education and Training Programmes
VEU-Rådet National Council for Adult Education and Continuing Training (Denmark)
VMBO Vocational education levels (Netherlands)

Vox Institute for Adult Learning (Norway)
VPL Validation of Prior Learning
VTC Vocational Training Corporation
VVU Degrees and Diplomas (Denmark)
WB World Bank

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In 2004–2005, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) entrusted the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) with the task of conducting and disseminating research on the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning on an international scale. Since then, UIL has contributed to the general body of knowledge on RVA and to the understanding of RVA practices.

In addition, UIL has collaborated with the French National Commission for UNESCO in organising two international seminars, one on the 'Recognition of experiential learning: An international analysis' in Paris (2005), the other on the 'Prospects for development in African countries' in Sèvres (2007). Both seminars showed the heightened interest among Member States in sharing experience and developing frameworks for RVA of non-formal and informal learning.

More recently, the adoption of the Belém Framework for Action by the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in December 2009 affirmed the importance of lifelong learning principles in addressing global challenges. It also specifically recommended developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition of all forms of learning.

Against this background, UIL, in collaboration with the Centre for Validation of Prior Learning at Inholland University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands, and in partnership with the French National Commission for UNESCO, organized an international conference in March 2010 on 'Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks – North–South collaborative research'. The aim of the conference was to arrive at a better understanding of issues of policy and practice surrounding the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning (RVA), with a special focus on linkages to qualifications frameworks in different national contexts.

The outcome of the conference was an increase in the body of knowledge on national and international recognition practices and qualifications frameworks. This body of knowledge is to be shared with Member States, with the aim of bringing the global North and South closer together into a single learning community. The conference was designed to take stock of existing progress and to highlight specific experiences and successes in the participating countries. In this way, this conference aimed to initiate a mutual learning process, based on a 'glass half-full' rather than a 'glass half-empty' approach. In other words, we have more to learn from each other than we sometimes realise.

This publication is the outcome of the international conference that was held in Hamburg in March 2010 with participants (experts and officials) from governmental organisations from more than twenty UNESCO Member States in all regions of the world. The reports contained herein demonstrate the many ways that recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning can help to make lifelong learning for all a reality!

Arne Carlsen, August 2013
Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg

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If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of educational systems until we reach the stage of a learning society. For these are the challenges education will be facing in the future. (Faure et al., 1972)

The above perspective on education was put forward by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1972. With this statement UNESCO played an important role in developing a common vision of lifelong learning and the learning society. In a modern learning society, the concept of lifelong learning is a vital component in developing and utilizing human potential. Lifelong learning covers the full range of learning opportunities, from early childhood through school to further and higher education. However, qualifications systems in many societies still focus on formal learning in educational institutions.

One of the greatest challenges that countries currently face is how to recognise learning that occurs outside the formal education sector. In this study, recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings are considered within a variety of national and regional contexts. We argue that formal learning is not sufficient to facilitate and utilize the full human potential of any society. RVA is an important instrument for comparing different forms of learning, in order to eliminate discrimination against those who acquire competences non-formally or informally. Individuals who have had limited access to, or low achievement in, formal education and training, or who learned skills predominantly in the workplace or other settings outside the formal system, are often disadvantaged in further learning and training, and in the labour market. By identifying and recognising certain competences, we render these competences visible for the learners themselves. By giving people the chance to have their competences formally recognised, we provide them with evidence of their personal capital and promote self-knowledge and self-esteem. For this reason, RVA promises to be a factor in motivating individuals to continue learning, thereby facilitating the learner's progress into further education or training, and increasing their chances of social and economic success.

Apart from the focus on the individual perspective, RVA raises the need for policy reformulation and applies perspectives on lifelong learning policies in different countries to fields such as educational reform, development of a lifelong learning system, skilled employment, innovation in education and learning, and equity.

Since UNESCO's statement in 1972, there has been much change and innovation within educational systems that focus on the recognition of learning outside the formal system. In addition to traditional qualifications systems, which mostly cater to RVA of formal learning, some Member States have developed mechanisms, such as national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), for the RVA of non-formal and informal learning; many more Member States are in the process of establishing such mechanisms.

This introduction reflects on the results of the international conference organised in Hamburg in March 2010, entitled "*Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks – North–South collaborative research*". This conference was organised by the UNESCO Institute

for Lifelong Learning in collaboration with the Centre for Validation of Prior Learning at Inholland University, the Netherlands, and in partnership with the French National Commission for UNESCO. The conference explored how UNESCO Member States are promoting lifelong learning through the establishment of RVA policies and mechanisms, and asked what the challenges are in establishing linkages between RVA and NQFs. More specifically, the objectives were to gain a better understanding about:

- Policy and practice of RVA related to non-formal and informal learning;
- Linking recognition practices to national reference points (national or sectoral qualifications frameworks and standards);
- Accommodating learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning in qualifications systems and national or sectoral frameworks;
- North–South differences with respect to RVA and NQF linkages; and
- Specific target-group orientation in the implementation of RVA.

The scope of the conference was not limited to RVA in the context of the workplace and vocational education and training, but also focused on RVA in the context of 'third-level' institutions, such as non-governmental organisations and agencies of civil society. The target groups that are referred to in the different country contributions to the conference include such as young people, 18+ adults, groups that experience exclusion in any form, low-skilled and poorly qualified adult workers, emigrants and immigrants, groups in developing countries that have limited access to formal education, and so-called "drop-outs" or "early school leavers" from formal systems of education. A limitation of this approach is that very few contributions considered RVA in the context of gender differences and/or ethnicity.

The conference sought to advance the available body of knowledge in relation to national and international recognition practices and qualifications frameworks, and to enable this learning to be shared effectively across Member States, by bringing countries from North and South closer together.

The introductory chapter precedes the national reports, which form the main body of this report. The introduction discusses the conceptual framework and the key areas of analysis of the country reports. To facilitate comparisons between the participating countries, it is useful to look at differences and common features in terms of five areas of analysis of RVA and NQF linkages:

- Approaches to national reference points for RVA;
- Policy and legislation;
- The contribution of recognition to social inclusion;
- Stakeholder involvement;
- Features of recognition processes.

The analysis will conclude with a discussion of the critical factors in the implementation and key lessons learned.

Background

Following Resolution 10 of the 33rd session of the General Conference (2005), UIL conducted studies on recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning policies and practice, and promoted the sharing of information and mutual learning through international meetings. Findings from research activities and international exchanges showed that since the late 1990s RVA moved higher up on the political agenda in many countries and evolved into a key element in lifelong learning. RVA has gained in relevance not only with regard to education and training policies, but also for strategies on employment, poverty, education, social inclusion and skills development. RVA systems are being developed with an eye to a future in which outcomes-based NQFs will support the necessary reforms in education and training, and facilitate nationally standardised and internationally comparable qualifications (UIL 2005, 2011, 2012; Singh, 2008, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Steenekamp and Singh 2012).

The above-mentioned "Hamburg conference" was held with the specific aim of continuing the promotion of mutual learning and facilitating North–South exchange. It allowed for an exchange of experience between countries with RVA systems – either established or 'under construction' – embedded in overarching lifelong learning strategies and those countries where interest is growing in RVA practices.

The national co-ordinators from governmental organisations and national research institutions in 23 UNESCO Member States participated. UIL's Interagency Advisory Group was represented by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), the European Training Foundation (ETF), the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning (Vox), the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and the French National Commission for UNESCO.

Methodology

The briefing of the national co-ordinators (Singh and Duvekot, 2010) prior to preparation of their country reports and presentations for the Hamburg conference was deliberately broad. The aim was to find out if and to what extent countries have national qualifications frameworks or alternatives to NQFs, in which the RVA of non-formal and informal learning is integrated. The country reports were based on a common agreed template, and included the following questions: whether countries have a national qualifications framework; whether countries have a lifelong learning policy that includes methods for recognition of non-formal and informal learning; which tools/instruments/methods are used for the RVA of competences; what the goals and impact of NQFs and RVA are (so far); and, finally, what challenges are involved in linking NQFs and RVA. In this way, despite the diversity in national contexts, the input from the different countries was comparable. The data included official policies, practices and processes in the broad fields of NQFs and RVA. Whenever unofficial or informal practices were presented, these always served the purpose of highlighting national policy objectives and practice.

Limitations to the scope of the conference and its outcomes – as presented in this publication – can also be mentioned. An important limitation concerns the random selection of the contributing and participating countries. The attending countries covered all UNESCO regions. This, however, does not support regional generalisations for the conference

topics. All contributions were specifically national contributions. Moreover, some regions were better represented than others. For example, no North American countries attended. Another limitation concerns high representation of wealthy Western and Northern European countries, with only one (Czech Republic) from Central and Eastern Europe. In this publication the term 'North' refers to all participating European countries, as well as New Zealand, the Republic of Korea (an OECD Member State) and South Africa. The term 'South' includes all participating countries in Asia (except New Zealand and the Republic of Korea) and countries in Latin America, the Arab world and Africa (except South Africa).

A final limitation concerns differences in levels of development or implementation, since some countries already have well-established NQFs and even RVA systems, while others are in the process of initiation or development. However, we balanced this limitation by ensuring the participation of national representatives who have experience in the development of NQFs at national level, in the field implementing RVA, or in national research institutes. Such individuals have in-depth knowledge of the challenges and opportunities of NQF-RVA developments and implementation in their countries.

The preparation, the conference itself, and its conclusions can best be considered as a qualitative study of the "state of the art" in applied linkages between NQFs and RVA. All participating countries shared an interest in the possibility of establishing and linking NQFs and RVA through mutual learning.

Conceptual framework
Recognition of non-formal and informal learning as a field of research as well as policy option is a recent development. While there is growing evidence that individuals can acquire their skills, knowledge and competences outside the formal education and training system ((Livingston, 2002; Overwien, 2005; Singh, 2009), there is little consensus about the definitions of the terms. This section therefore attempts to clarify the terms used and how they link to the overall purpose of analysing recognition practices and NQFs. The conceptual framework serves the following purposes:
- Provides an overarching understanding of the concept of lifelong learning;
- Provides an operational definition of formal, non-formal and informal learning;
- Deals with outcomes-based NQFs as a reference point for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning;
- Examines the notion of the middle ground between NQFs and recognition practices;
- Provides clarification of the terms 'recognition', 'validation' and 'accreditation'.

The overarching concept of lifelong learning
The overarching concept of lifelong learning is used as a standard to promote learning on a holistic basis, to counter inequalities in educational opportunity, and to raise the quality of learning. Lifelong learning implies linkages between various learning settings and serves social, policy and economic purposes. Several Member States have adopted national objectives for moving towards a lifelong learning society. The prevalent dependence on formal education and qualifications in the past meant that social and economic goals and functions

such as employability, integration and inclusion were underemphasized. Likewise, educational objectives such as empowering human potential, preserving cultural values and promoting social cohesion were neglected. By emphasising capabilities and capacities in all social contexts, a learning society involves all social groups, irrespective of gender, age, social class, ethnicity, etc. People are encouraged to learn throughout their lives – to learn what they like, when they like, and from whomever they like – and to impart their knowledge to those who wish to learn from them (Naik, 1977; Sen, 2000).

In a comprehensive educational system that integrates formal, non-formal and informal learning, every individual can have adequate opportunities to learn throughout life. Of primary interest here are the individual's learning potential, capacity and flexibility, supporting self-awareness, an understanding of individual autonomy and a sense of dignity and responsibilities as citizens. Lifelong learning refers, then, to the personalized need of individuals to develop skills and knowledge relevant to their life and work, in a job or other form of paid or unpaid social participation (Duvekot et al., 2007). Human potential theories are about an integrative and continuous process of enhancing human capacities by enriching existing potential through micro-level human development interventions and macro-level policy interventions. The overall aim is to create and sustain an environment that helps individuals achieve their full potential to their own and their organization's advantage (Kalra, 1997).

The implementation of lifelong learning from this multi-level perspective entails several challenges. Responsibility for tackling the problem of inequality of educational opportunity and raising the quality of learning outcomes lies both at the (macro) policy level and at the (micro) institutional level. At the macro-level, a lifelong learning approach calls for a more flexible and integrated system. In a number of countries, national qualification frameworks have been developed to respond to the growing need to recognize learning and knowledge that has been achieved outside the formal education sectors. At the micro-level, recognition practices serve as bottom-up strategies that support individuals by providing the basis for goal-directed development and career planning, tailor-made learning, and the ongoing documentation of their professional and personal development. This means attaching special importance to learner participation, developing the capacities of assessors, social partners (employers and employees), and national authorities on the use of portfolios for recognition purposes.

Formal, non-formal, and informal learning
The key issue at stake in RVA is the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning. According to the definitions in the UNESCO Guidelines (UIL, 2012):
- **Formal learning** takes place in education and training institutions, and is recognised by relevant national authorities, leading to diplomas and qualifications. Formal learning is structured according to educational arrangements such as curricula, qualifications and teaching/learning requirements.
- **Non-formal learning** is learning that is in addition or alternative to formal learning and is also structured according to educational arrangements, but is more flexible. It is provided through organisations and services that have been set up to complement

formal education systems, but it also takes place in community-based settings, the workplace, or through the activities of civil society organisations. Through the RVA process, non-formal learning can also lead to qualifications and other recognitions.

- **Informal learning** is unintentional learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities, and through the interests and activities of individuals. Through the RVA process, competences gained in informal learning can be made visible, and can contribute to qualifications and other recognitions. The term *experiential learning* is also used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience.

While, for definitional purposes, 'formal', 'non-formal' and 'informal' are described as discrete terms, they are interrelated in practice. For example, non-formal learning increasingly leads to qualifications, and many countries are moving towards certifying all forms of learning. Non-formal and informal learning remain an important alternative pathway that needs to be made visible, leading to some kind of recognition or certification as in the formal system.

When considering this terminology in a global scope, key differences can be distinguished between developed and developing countries with regard to non-formal and informal education. This was elaborated by Singh (2013) as follows:

1. The size of the non-formal and informal learning sectors varies, with much larger non-formal education and informal sectors in the South than in the North;
2. The nature of non-formal learning varies, more frequently involving basic education in the South and workplace-oriented learning in the North;
3. The levels of learning that precede upper secondary school are of greatest importance in the South, while countries in the global North tend to focus resources at upper secondary vocational levels or above.

Moreover, in the North countries tend to draw a line between non-formal and formal education systems when discussing RVA. By contrast, in the South, the boundaries between formal and non-formal learning are often not so sharply drawn. In some countries, such as Bhutan and Jordan, non-formal education programmes are mostly organised on a national basis, are the largest providers of education, and are based on consistently described and assessed learning outcomes. In Namibia, non-formal basic education is considered a better, more forward-looking option by many participants who feel stigmatised and excluded by the formal education system (McKay and Romm 2006). Some of the problems in non-formal education in the South are related to quality. Often non-formal programmes lack a coordinated framework within the general education system or the TVET system to accredit the learning outcomes based on formal standards. In the case of Afghanistan the TVET system consists of a fragmented and disconnected range of providers. Afghanistan hopes to raise the quality of non-formal education and training by developing a coordinated approach through the Afghanistan Qualifications Framework. This is expected to give credit for learning awarded at all levels – and delivered by an interconnected network of accredited, public and private training providers.

In the countries from the global North that reported for this study, non-formal education is predominantly workplace-based and strongly focused on professional training. In France several types of operators organise this non-formal education and training. Most of them provide vocational certification. In the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, short-term non-formal training is organised in the context of apprenticeships in local enterprises, thus supporting adults in non-formal VET schemes. In addition to the above workplace-based training in developed countries, much community-oriented adult education takes the form of non-formal learning. In Finland, non-formal programmes are connected to preparatory training for adults who complete vocational training. In France, many non-formal programmes provide basic education or second-chance education. Norway has a strong tradition of liberal adult education provided through correspondence courses, evening classes, distance education and study associations. In Portugal, adult education and training programmes have played an important role in the dual certification (vocational and academic) of adults. Various principles, such as constructivist perspectives on curriculum, local construction of curriculum, formative evaluation, personal and social mediation and the application of a reference framework for key competences, are integral to non-formal programmes for adults in Portugal. In the Republic of Korea, accreditation of non-formal education programmes is an important element of programmes run by the Academic Credit Bank System (ACBS). This accreditation determines whether the quality of programmes and courses is equivalent in credit terms to those of universities or colleges. There are strict accreditation criteria, such as the qualifications of the full-time professors at a junior college.

In contrast to the global North, where non-formal education is predominantly organised on a private basis and by private organisations that are concerned with professional training, in the South, non-formal education is primarily organised by voluntary agencies that collaborate with the government in official programmes.

National qualifications frameworks for lifelong learning
The establishment of national or sectoral frameworks is often seen as a critical factor issue in the development of RVA (Bjørnåvold, 2008). NQFs are systems of equivalency relating to a set of nationally agreed standards developed by competent public authorities. NQFs recognise learning outcomes and competences from all forms of learning (UIL, 2012). As Bjørnåvold, writing from the perspective of European countries, argues, NQFs and recognition of non-formal and informal learning should be seen as complementary. Accordingly, he describes four ways in which NQFs can support RVA:
1. NQFs focused on the development of explicit outcome-based standards can accommodate non-formal and informal learning; and
2. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning can open up qualifications to a broader group of users – from the domains of work, adult education and the voluntary sector;
3. NQFs and recognition practices can enable people to progress both vertically and horizontally on the basis of their competences rather than on the basis of specific learning; and

4. Transparent quality assurance processes must be developed if non-formal and informal learning are to be accorded the same quality requirements as formal learning.

Learning outcome standards in NQFs may need to be more flexible in non-formal learning settings than in the formal system. This has been suggested by some authors (e.g., Downes, 2011), given that learning outcome standards for non-formal education may threaten a loss of identity for this sector and also threaten learners from marginalised backgrounds, previously alienated from the formal education system.

The 'middle ground' between national qualifications frameworks and RVA practices
National Qualifications Frameworks do not themselves generate RVA. Rather, they provide an important enabling environment (Dyson and Keating, 2005). For RVA to be successful, qualifications frameworks need therefore to be linked to the real world of learning and working at several levels. According to Duvekot and Konrad (2007), effective national qualifications frameworks meet the following requirements:
- Develop individual competence portfolios, effective in different settings or contexts;
- Link competence requirements and learning needs to tailor-made education (non-formal) offers;
- Link competence requirements in work and voluntary organisations to the content of further education and training.

Duvekot and Konrad have conceptualised the linkages between RVA and NQFs as the 'learning triangle' of lifelong learning strategies. The concept of the 'learning triangle' introduces learning processes in three possible modes of RVA; summative, formative and generic.

The *generic* mode focuses on linking learning outcomes embedded in national standards with learning outcomes embedded in organisations. The *summative* mode offers a direct and formal procedure for accrediting all learning experiences of an individual to a qualification and a specific standard within an NQF. Its focus is on certification or qualification where individuals seek this goal. The *formative* mode aims at personal and career development. Formative assessment is a more informal procedure for accrediting learning experiences in relation to a specific active goal in professional and voluntary work, and in further learning.

Linkages between NQFs and RVA
From the country reports it is apparent that countries are vastly different in terms of social, economic, educational and demographic challenges. To facilitate comparisons between the countries participating in the Hamburg conference, it is useful to look at differences and common features in terms of the six areas of analysis of RVA and NQFs mentioned above.

Approaches to national reference points for RVA
Despite the common trend towards NQFs, countries differ with regard to whether they reference RVA against existing formal education and training standards or against a competence-based NQF. Within this fundamental division, countries have developed a variety of

approaches and alternative reference points suited to their contexts and social and economic needs. In addition, there are divisions between developed and developing countries. To understand the diversity of approaches in the linking of RVA to national reference points, it may be useful to identify the following discrete approaches:

1. Recognition of learning outcomes and competences based on standards defined in the NQFs or nationally established qualifications systems;
2. Recognition of an individual's learning outcomes and competences based on education and training curricula that can be directly linked to a nationally established qualification;
3. Recognition of an individual's learning outcomes and competences based on competence frameworks specific to work (occupational standards);
4. Recognition of NQFs in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector;
5. Equivalency frameworks aligned to formal education.

Learning outcomes-based standards in a comprehensive NQF or nationally established qualifications system	Learning outcomes-based standards in higher education	Labour competence frameworks related to specific occupational standards.	NQFs in the TVET sector	Equivalency frameworks in basic education
Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Mauritius, Portugal, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa	Malaysia, Republic of Korea	Mexico, Netherlands	Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, India, Namibia, Trinidad and Tobago	Afghanistan, Bhutan, Jordan, Syria

Table i.1: Reference points for recognition of learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning in different countries. Source: Editors.

The *first approach* is followed by countries where outcomes from formal and non-formal learning are recognised within a national qualifications framework. In New Zealand, South Africa, France, Portugal, Finland and Mauritius, the creation of learning outcomes-based NQFs has been a key precondition for linking outcomes from non-formal and informal learning to qualifications. In New Zealand, these learning outcomes are quality-assured before they are linked to the framework. In France, the NQF is linked to the national system for the validation of acquired experience (VAE). The national repository of skills descriptions (ROME) was already linked to the national repository of qualifications in 2008 (RNCP) (Charraud, 2007).

In Portugal, the National Qualifications System and its various elements (RVCC system, New Opportunities Centres and the Catalogue of Qualifications) are, similarly, designed to improve the certification (academic and vocational) levels of adults. For European countries, the referencing of NQFs to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is viewed as an opportunity to integrate non-formal and informal learning experiences.

The *second approach* to recognising learning outcomes is being followed by Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. In Malaysia and the Republic of Korea, RVA occurs in the context of the existing education and training curricula. The Academic Credit Bank System in the Republic of Korea is an example of this. This 'bank' allows citizens to receive accreditation for all learning outcomes, whether based on formal, non-formal or informal learning experiences.

The *third approach* – recognising learning outcomes based on professional or occupational standards – is followed by Mexico, and the Netherlands. The main aims of this approach are better and faster integration into the labour market of private-sector, self-employed, and government workers, including teachers.

The *fourth approach* involves recognition of learning outcomes in relation to NQFs in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. Namibia, Burkina Faso, Ghana, India, and Trinidad and Tobago have either developed or are in the process of developing an NQF in the TVET sector. For these countries, skills development will be beneficial to further economic and social development. Given that the harmonisation of education and training qualifications has not yet been achieved in most countries, adopting a pragmatic stance with respect to the focus on skills development and NQFs can be a useful strategy. This may be particularly useful in Africa, where most countries have yet to transcend the colonial legacy in their educational systems. Furthermore, as Allais (2010) points out, national vocational qualifications frameworks (NVQFs) are less contentious, given their focus on outcomes and competence-based training, as compared with the disciplinary and content-driven approaches of general and university education programmes. NQFs are becoming a priority in the above countries and efforts are being made to include basic education levels in an NQF.

The *fifth and final category* comprises those countries that still face challenges in establishing reference points for RVA and require technical expertise to develop and implement an NQF (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Syria and Jordan). These countries experience the absence of an NQF as a limiting factor in developing competence frameworks for measuring learner progression. They are persuading education providers to recognise learning outcomes in the context of non-formal education while developing equivalency frameworks aligned to the formal education system, to assess non-formal education at the basic level.

In summary, there is a discernible global trend towards the establishment of national qualifications frameworks. However, the linkage of RVA to NQFs still has a long way to go. Many countries still need to put a lot of effort into establishing NQFs with standards and criteria that account for learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning experiences. As we saw in the above categorisation, alternative frameworks are being developed or implemented that are applicable in the existing social, economic and educational contexts.

These initiatives can act as bridges in the transition to establishing NQFs with full linkage to RVA. Professional development in the non-formal educational sector, including staff conditions (status, pay, continuity, investment) will be crucial to this transition. Building bridges means creating awareness and expertise in relation to learning outcomes approaches both for formal and non-formal learning. The individual learner or citizen should be supported on both sides in crossing the bridge. In the Netherlands, France and Norway, for instance, the role of the non-formal educational sector is strengthened by involving non-formal education staff (managers, guidance counsellors, etc.) as assessors and even practice-based trainers. Their expertise is linked to acquiring formal accreditation, not only for learners, but also for their own expertise and responsibilities within their sector of non-formal education. In the Republic of Korea the ACBS creates a similar status for the non-formal education sector by substantially valuing the learning outcomes that people acquire in this sector. The same goes for accrediting practice-based learning outcomes of non-formal settings in South Africa.

Policy and legislation
The country cases show that those countries with established systems are also those that have made RVA a priority in their political agenda, and have adopted policies and legislation specifically related to RVA in their education systems. There is evidence, notably from certain European countries (the Czech Republic, France, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands), of legislation and policies that usually deal with RVA within the legal framework of the education and training system or as regulation of training policies on the level of economic sectors. In France, the strong legal base of RVA assures each person's right to have their formally, informally and non-formally acquired experiences assessed. This entitlement is conditional on a minimum of three years' experience related to the desired qualification. The experience must also relate to vocational and professional skills. In Finland, RVA is enshrined in national legislation for all levels of education. In the Czech Republic, the Act on Recognition of Further Education Results is an important element in the country's lifelong learning strategy. Its major focus is on gaining the commitment and the involvement of stakeholders such as employers, ministries, chambers of commerce and trade unions. In the Netherlands, a quality code for RVA providers was signed in 2005 by all national stakeholders. This code regulates the supply of RVA services and sets standards for RVA procedures.

In the economic sphere, national policies and collaborative agreements have also been established through co-operation with social partners. In Denmark, an agreement between the social partners (employers and employees) in 2007 enhanced the use of RVA and aimed at creating better opportunities for further education and training by offering individuals the opportunity to have their competences recognised in formal education and training.
In some countries, such as New Zealand, Mauritius, South Africa and Namibia, RVA legislation and policies are directly subsumed under regulations relevant for the NQF. In New Zealand, for example, section 246A (1) of the Education Act ensures that qualifications integrate formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes. In Mauritius, RVA acts as a bridge to further and higher education. In this respect it helps to alleviate poverty in that people can get better jobs and improve their quality of life. At a basic level RVA also helps in reducing the number of illiterate people by helping them to continue with their studies.

At university level, in Malaysia as well as in the Republic of Korea, policies and regulations deal with RVA as a tool for gaining access to universities. In the Republic of Korea, it has been shown that RVA is crucial to an open educational system for providing higher education opportunities, thus promoting socio-cultural equality and learning rights. Moreover, legislation ensures that there is no legal discrimination between university graduates and those who have acquired their degree through the Academic Credit Bank System.

The contribution of RVA to social inclusion

RVA-NQF linkages are highly relevant in the context of increasing poverty and huge socio-economic disparities in some of the developing countries covered by this study, as well as in relation to youth unemployment and the economic crisis. In Burkina Faso nearly half of the population of 14 million lives below the poverty line. Even in South Africa, which has achieved high-level macro stability, 41 per cent of its population lives in rural poverty, a high proportion of households are headed by young mothers with few income opportunities, and the legacy of Apartheid and high levels of unemployment in the under-30 age group (49 per cent in 2002) remain significant challenges. Namibia too has had to cope with deep social divisions along racial and tribal lines, and with large rural populations living in poverty. Mexico has challenges concerning poverty reduction and the need to create new opportunities for the poor. In Jordan and Syria, as in other countries in the Arab world, unemployment of young people and adults is a major problem. In many Asian countries, literacy rates are low (Bhutan 53 per cent; Afghanistan 34 per cent, with 18 per cent for women and 50 per cent for men). In the developed world, the problems are of a different nature; they mostly relate to coping with the challenges of a rapidly changing economy and of improving opportunities in the labour market for various target groups, such as young people, adults, migrants, and prisoners, etc.

The issue of recognising non-formal learning outcomes as a means of increasing access to economic opportunity and social inclusion has become even more relevant with the onset of the global financial crisis. In many countries, opportunities for non-formal education and RVA have become policy objectives. In these countries, direct linkages are apparent between articulated policy objectives and active citizenship, personal/social fulfilment, and community development goals. For example, India's huge non-formal and informal sectors dealing with literacy, basic education, continuing education and skills development serve as important pathways for housewives, agricultural and industrial workers, working children and girls who cannot attend all-day schools, and unemployed adults and young people. RVA has the potential to convert non-formal learning into real opportunities, not only in terms of access to further education opportunities and qualifications, but also in terms of self-fulfilment and self-awareness, poverty reduction and income generation, and greater participation in the community. Malaysia reports on two categories of learners that still need to be embraced by a lifelong learning strategy: those who are under-represented across a whole range of basic and post-basic education, and those that have had the benefit of some form of post-basic education, but are not equipped to deal effectively with the technology-driven economy.

Lifelong learning is not just about raising levels of qualifications in society, but also about widening participation of those people previously excluded from learning opportunities. The concepts of social inclusion and widening participation need to be drawn further into the general understanding of lifelong learning. Afghanistan highlights the importance of reaching disadvantaged groups as a reason for promoting linkages between non-formal learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks. However, additional bridge and preparatory courses will need to be offered to those who require extra learning experience to attain qualifications, and if necessary, access and entry-level barriers must also be lowered. In Afghanistan, there is a large section of society that does not even have the necessary literacy and numeracy background to attain the lowest level of the qualifications framework. For such groups it will be necessary to incorporate levels for the attainment of literacy and adult basic education into the NQF.

Non-formal equivalency programmes at the basic education level in Jordan, Syria and Namibia provide an alternative option for meeting the learning needs of people of different ages and backgrounds. In Syria, some recognition of skills related to literacy classes permits adults to either sit for an exam and return to mainstream programmes, or join computer-based literacy courses. In Trinidad and Tobago, widening access through bridging programmes, evening classes, work-based learning, on-the-job training, distance learning and prior learning assessment is now a priority. This is accomplished with the aid of easy educational progression and government funding to link the education system horizontally and vertically. In Jordan, Questscope, an international non-governmental organization, ensures that non-formal programmes which help school dropouts gain a 'General Equivalence Diploma' also enable learners to progress into state-run vocational training institutions alongside students from the formal educational system with a 10th grade certificate. In Gambia, the development of key skills is crucial to the eradication of poverty. In addition to agriculture and other sectors important to the economy, skills standards are being developed in the field of adult and non-formal education. While capacity building of actors in non-formal adult learning and skills development remains a major challenge in Gambia, the country's primary objective is to open up lifelong learning opportunities through community learning centres, resource centres, and continuing and distance education.

Social inclusion is an important goal, not only in developing countries, but also in developed countries. The use of RVA to promote equality of access and participation in education is important for active citizenship, personal/social fulfilment and community development. In the context of the European Union's EU2020 growth strategy, RVA will be applied to the specific goals of reducing school drop-out rates below 10%, ensuring that at least 40% of 30–34-year-olds complete third level education, and in the context of poverty and social exclusion. The EU2020 goals target at least 20 million people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Country cases from the Netherlands, France, Denmark and Norway show that RVA also plays a role in the shorter term to overcome the effects of the financial crisis. In these countries, both governments and the social partners joined forces to strengthen the application of RVA for workers who are in danger of losing their job. These practices have wider relevance beyond Europe as they provide examples of ways in which RVA can tackle socio-economic problems. RVA initiatives in Europe have tended to focus on specific target

groups. In the Netherlands, the government is concentrating its efforts on adult workers and jobseekers without higher education qualifications. Similarly, in Denmark RVA is part of the strategy to facilitate movement from low skills to a diploma degree. In Portugal, the adult education and training programme to which RVA is tied is effectively targeted to people with low qualifications. This initiative is, first and foremost, a network of regional centres that facilitate highly diversified non-formal education programmes covering the public and private, and the education and training sectors. In Norway, the main target groups are immigrants, senior citizens and prisoners.

Stakeholder involvement
It is useful to take a closer look at the aims for the public, private and civil society sectors.

In the private sector, the social partners (employers and employee associations) play an essential role in a number of countries. In the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and France, employer bodies and trade unions are important stakeholders nationally and regionally, both in terms of policy and practice. One example is offering RVA in the context of apprenticeships and other training schemes in local enterprises, thus supporting adults in non-formal VET schemes. In France and the Netherlands, social partners play a key role in recognising the prior learning and competences of employees. This avoids unnecessary costs that would be incurred through additional training and education. Flexible adjustment to new competence needs in new industrial sectors and newly developed jobs is important in South Africa.

In the public sector, the responsibility of regional authorities ensures broadening stakeholders' involvement, for instance by engaging adult candidates who have gone through an RVA process at upper secondary level into a digital registration system. Other incentives come from employers and trade unions that utilise RVA to fill vacancies in sectors with a shortage of labour; for example, in healthcare and education.

In civil society and the NGO sector, there is evidence from several countries that voluntary organisations are at the forefront in providing non-formal learning programmes for adults. In Norway, for instance, the Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL), the umbrella organisation for adult learning in the non-governmental voluntary sector, promotes RVA for adults, adult educators and volunteers.

It is also important to highlight regional issues and the role of regional authorities in the implementation of RVA. This is especially important in countries as vast as India, which has 26 states and 14 regional languages and a decentralised system of non-formal education. Different ministries are involved in skills development in India at the state level.

Because of the different interests at stake, some policy objectives are primarily economical and related to labour market integration, better utilisation of competences within an enterprise, or worker mobility in the informal and formal sectors. Others are more related to education and training system reforms, efficiency of learning systems and transparency of qualifications and certifications. For all countries, however, a major reason for recognition is the integration and empowerment of marginalised social groups and individuals, as well as strengthening the motivation for lifelong learning.

Features of recognition practice

This section highlights recognition practices from those participating countries with established systems of RVA. These include New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, France, Norway, Denmark, Czech Republic, South Africa, Mauritius, the Netherlands and Portugal. Some countries have placed greater emphasis on developing assessment by portfolio (Norway and Denmark), while others have shown leadership in conceptual development (New Zealand and South Africa). In South Africa, four different approaches to RVA have emerged. We can refer to these as the credit-exchange approach, the developmental approach, the radical approach and the 'Trojan horse' approach. The credit-exchange approach to RVA measures the ability of an individual to perform certain job tasks to a predetermined standard. The developmental approach emphasises what the learner has learned rather than matching competence to pre-agreed standards. Here, curriculum and institutional prescriptions are used to determine 'acceptable' prior learning. The radical approach focuses on collective rather than individual learning – only the experience of the emancipated group counts as knowledge. Finally, the ' Trojan horse' approach to RVA involves an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula so that experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge move closer to (and complement) each other. Some countries, such as New Zealand and France, have institutionalised the process, while South Africa in the post-Apartheid era has invested in policies and legislation that promote redress and access. While some countries have a long tradition of RVA (France and New Zealand), others have experiences that are more recent.

All of these countries have developed national reference points, which form the benchmarks used for assessment. Finland and Portugal, for example, have competence-based frameworks for adults that are used for assessment of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. Professionalization of assessment based on learning outcomes has become an important issue in developing RVA systems. Combining traditional methods and tests with other methods such as practical demonstrations has allowed the development of relatively flexible procedures. This requires competent assessors and reliable validation procedures to ensure the authority and reliability of the results. In New Zealand, learning outcomes are identified by profiling and facilitation. This entails carefully interviewing candidates to ascertain the qualifications that best reflect their knowledge and competences. In Portugal, the continuing development of adult educators, assessors and trainers is made possible through the sharing of practices, knowledge and experience between teachers and trainers who conduct adult learning programmes and undertake validation assessments. South Africa and New Zealand have in place facilities for the registration of assessors. Professionalization is, of course, not the only issue involved in assessment. For example, a recent international review (Carrigan and Downes, 2009) raises concerns that assessment may alienate potential learners from marginalised backgrounds who have negative experiences of such from school.

An important feature of RVA is the growing tendency towards continuity from formative assessment to summative accreditation, as seen in the steps to identify learning outcome equivalencies, such as increasing the understanding of portfolio methods, quality assurance guidelines, guidance and counselling knowledge, and learning outcome descriptions. In

France, the Netherlands and Norway, a clear and easy-to-follow process of assessment and accreditation is being developed and used. The responsible exam committees that safeguard the quality of the qualifications are, in terms of RVA, also responsible for acknowledging the validity of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and their linkage to formal learning outcomes. The applied assessment methods may vary (i.e., the role of the assessors, the numbers of credits open to RVA, etc.) but they are always based on a portfolio that is judged and measured. In France, the portfolio is directly assessed by the examining committee for the particular qualification. In the Netherlands the assessors that deliver a portfolio statement for an individual learner, are different from exam committees that conduct the final assessment. Such formal assessment of non-formal and informal learning seems to be well embedded in existing NQFs, although evidence also shows that the number of applications for a qualification by means of RVA is not very large. The fear of formal assessment is clearly not absent in summative accreditation. In South Africa, criterion-referenced assessment (individual attainments) as well as exit-level summative assessments (examinations) and norm-referenced assessments (grading and averaging) are used as part of a more integrative assessment process. Regarding the transferability of 'good practices' in the field of summative accreditation there appears to be a general roadmap to follow:

1. Build upon the existing (national) procedure for quality-assurance of formal learning outcomes;
2. Professionalize the staff assigned to quality assurance by recognizing and assessing the value of sector-related non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
3. Strengthen expertise by setting up (or strengthening) network relations with relevant stakeholders in the sector (employers, trade unions, etc.); and
4. Focus on regional practices in learning and working.

Once this roadmap has been followed, it is a matter of benchmarking other countries' practices to find out which practices in other countries approaches to linking NQFs and RVA might be adopted and integrated into existing lifelong learning systems. In many countries in the North, the content of qualifications is also regularly updated through bilateral agreements between stakeholders from education and the labour market.

Closely related to formative assessment, there is a growing use of portfolio methods to describe and document learning outcomes. The use of portfolios is growing alongside the role of RVA in opening up access and providing credits for learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning. The Nordic states, particularly Denmark (*My Competence Folder*) and Norway (*Competence Proof*), have developed portfolio instruments for the evaluation of prior learning for formative objectives such as creating career steps, or new careers within a sector or an organisation.

One way to overcome obstacles such as cost would be to develop innovative and creative ways to transfer approaches developed in one sector to another. Approaches developed in workplace learning could be combined with formal education credits. Alternatively, individual assessment could provide access to an advanced study programme. Different

approaches can enrich each other, as is seen in examples from the Republic of Korea, Norway and Denmark. The combinations depend on the aim and context of the programme.

Some countries have developed comprehensive RVA systems linked to related tools and measures, such as credit transfers that measure non-formal and informal learning. Developing a system where an individual can transfer credit adds flexibility to the learning process, allowing people to enter and leave education and training programmes without penalty and to progress towards a qualification over time (the Republic of Korea and New Zealand). Credit transfer systems are increasingly becoming the focus of competence-based recognition reforms and have proven helpful where implemented. However, in any system of educational credit transfer, it is vital to put checks in place to safeguard quality and prevent corruption. The safeguard might rest in the hands of the examining committee entrusted with allocating credits (see in this respect the practice in France, the Netherlands or Norway).

Usually the assessment process used for RVA requires lots of additional support during the application process. The provision of information to key players is important. In several countries, professional guides and counsellors are identified and trained to promote RVA and to support candidates. The case of Norway highlights the importance of professionalism among validation staff. In France, RVA guidance and counselling was increased, leading to the birth of the new profession of "APEL advisor". Mauritius emphasises that information should take into account linguistic complexities, which may impede fair validation; as a result, Mauritius will use Mauritian creole to facilitate the process of RVA.

During the implementation process, many countries have shown that attention should be paid to the provision of individual support to identify and document skills. Implementation of RVA should not be a cumbersome process for the individual, as reported in New Zealand. Sufficient time should be allowed, and collection of evidence should not only be documented but also simulated or demonstrated in real situations, as reported in France, Mauritius and South Africa. The process of matching skills with competences described in training documentation should not be off-putting for those who have had limited interaction with formal education.

The case of Norway shows that there is a need for more structured and reliable documentation in the voluntary sector. For working life, a major challenge is for employers to be aware of and implement the principles of the basic assessment and thus provide better documentation, which will enable employees to progress in work and education. In Denmark, the reported challenge for the Ministry of Education is to better combine the formative and summative approaches.

For countries without established systems of RVA, the importance of capacity-building of RVA personnel cannot be overstated. In Afghanistan, Bhutan, Jordan and Syria, educators, instructional managers and facilitators currently lack the ability to assess non-formal learning outcomes. Mauritius has indicated the importance of capacity-building of assessors and facilitators.

Challenges and critical factors in the implementation of RVA

While some countries have highlighted the potential and actual benefits of RVA (see relevant section of this introduction), many have also highlighted the difficulties in its implementation. Countries were asked to highlight the way forward; namely, what they regard as the factors conducive to the development and implementation of RVA systems. This section therefore deals with difficulties, obstacles and challenges, as well as factors that are critical to the development and implementation of RVA–NQF linkages. These challenges and critical factors exist at the macro-level as well as at the meso- and micro-levels (Downes, 2010).

Challenges in collecting sufficient data on RVA impact and outcomes

In recent years a number of developed and developing countries have produced policies and practice in the RVA of non-formal and informal learning. There is a growing demand by adults and young people that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in the course of their life experiences be made visible, evaluated and accredited in different contexts (work, education, family life, community and society). Norway has reported in this volume that a large number of people use the opportunity to have their skills validated in order to access upper secondary education. The Norwegian survey also points to significant variation between different fields of study. In Mauritius, up to 2011, some 50 persons had already acquired either a full qualification or a record of learning. In South Africa, between 1995 and 2004, the total number of qualifications awarded increased, with the highest growth in four-year primary degrees, honours degrees and master's degrees. However, uptake data from some countries show that the potential of RVA is not fully realised; uptake is uneven. Data from the Danish Ministry of Education shows that uptake of RVA is higher in vocational training than in general education. South Africa attributes limited uptake between 1995 and 2004 to staff and resource shortages, lack of compliance with South African Qualifications Authority requirements, and to the fact that implementation plans and projects had not yet been developed for all sectors.

In addition to the slow uptake in some countries, there is another major challenge in collecting sufficient data about RVA outcomes and in presenting an accurate picture of how successfully RVA has been implemented. In New Zealand, there is no separate data on RVA because RVA assessment is part of the credit transfer system, and is not distinguished from traditional assessment. Denmark reports that it has not systematically conducted quantitative or qualitative analyses of outcomes and impact from RVA; rather, qualitative data from case studies is used to highlight benefits of RVA to the individual. Most benefits of RVA are qualitative. In general, the case studies highlight the role of RVA in increasing employability and mobility in the labour market. However, they are not sufficient for advocating for RVA. Better data on the effects of RVA are therefore needed. Mexico, up to 2011, has not carried out an impact evaluation on firm productivity or economic and social progress for workers. CONOCER, however, is in the process of developing the instruments and mechanisms to evaluate impact by building a database of firms, voluntary organisations and educational institutions that certify their workers.

Enabling environment

The set of policy and legislative conditions favourable to RVA is known as the 'enabling environment'. Difficulties at this level for countries in the global South include absence of a legal framework and national guidelines, the need for regulatory frameworks for quality, regional strategies, and strategies for social inclusion of disadvantaged persons. In the North, where such legal frameworks do exist, there is often, as the cases from the Netherlands and Norway show, a need for more effective and transparent procedures. Local authorities and higher education institutions have different ways of dealing with the outcomes of RVA procedures. There are also issues concerning quality assurance, especially for maintaining and organising the necessary independent and qualitative role of assessors. South Africa reports that although RVA legislation and policies are in place, the key challenge is to implement RVA on a larger scale.

A further systemic challenge reported by many countries concerns the costs for the individual and the system of information and guidance, assessors, facilitators, auditors and awarding bodies. For Mexico a major challenge is to put in place cost-sharing (state-supported and self-financing) mechanisms for the RVA of labour competences. Such a mechanism has been put in place in France, namely the Joint Fund for Career Security (Fonds paritaire de sécurisation des parcours professionnels). This is a combined form of financing by social partners and the state, which is expected to provide continuing training to a further 200,000 jobseekers and over 500,000 low-skilled employees per year. In France, the funding of RVA is seen in relation to broader strategic issues of access, relevance and the state of the economy, rather than in terms of only short-term operational issues.

For South Africa, the main barriers are the high cost of assessment and the limited number of assessment centres that focus on RVA compared with the priority given to RVA in the national policy guidelines. In Mauritius, funding of RVA has been a major issue. The pilot projects were funded by the National Empowerment Foundation and, taking into consideration the low income of prospective RVA candidates, the fees were subsidised. Namibia will soon introduce a national training levy that aims to motivate employers to fund, either directly or indirectly, training and development of their employees. Another barrier at the macro or systemic level, in this case highlighted by Malaysia, is the importance of making supportive RVA infrastructure accessible to those who need it most.

Cross-sectoral linkages

Several countries reported limitations with respect to the involvement of different sectors and stakeholders in the development of the RVA system. This involvement is important in creating cross-sectoral confidence and trust in RVA systems.

Namibia and South Africa report that different education sectors lack co-ordinated efforts to develop an integrated and comprehensive RVA system for lifelong learning. Denmark identifies the lack of sustainable relationships between the education sector, the labour market, and civil society agencies as a key barrier to RVA. This hinders the visibility of learning and validation of learning within and across the different learning sectors.

France indicates a lack of trust in the validation system by employers, who may or may not accept qualification documents issued through the validation process. Norway reports that co-operation between the Labour and Welfare Administration and local centres responsible for the recognition of learning at upper secondary level is underutilised – relatively few unemployed people take advantage of the opportunities provided to have their learning validated.

Other limitations include those of the different domains in which general and vocational qualifications originate. In the Republic of Korea, the implementation of the Academic Credit Bank System and the Lifelong Learning Account System could be more strongly linked to the Korean Qualifications Framework and the Korean Skills Standards.

The Netherlands, Denmark and Norway advocate co-operation between all relevant stakeholders, as it is important that the system is perceived as transparent and trustworthy in the same way as formal education. Denmark also calls for connecting public and private sectors. It reports that the concept and the opportunities of RVA are still not well known among potential users and prioritised groups. The Netherlands advocates, meanwhile, collaboration between companies and educational services.

Mexico has identified joint effort and consensus among employers, workers, educators and government officials as the single most important factor for the success of RVA in workforce development. New Zealand highlights how industry training bodies and registered training organisations and government can work together with learning institutions to promote RVA constructively. Other good examples of shared responsibility between stakeholders come from the Netherlands, where a quality code for applying RVA to an NQF is governed by the Ministry of Education and the social partners.

Advocacy

Norway and Denmark have reported that awareness among stakeholders of the benefits of RVA is crucial for the transition from the policy level to the actual implementation of RVA at the level of training providers. In Africa, the experience of Mauritius shows that it is effective to have a focused communication strategy to inform people about RVA, and to brief the major stakeholders on international best practices in RVA. The Mauritius Qualifications Authority intends to intensify its efforts to increase public awareness of the benefits of linking the NQF with RVA.

In some countries, agencies working in alignment with the ministry of education, such as Vox in Norway, disseminate information on RVA's potential to make the practical competence development of adults visible. One of the aims in this regard is to relate validation to career guidance. RVA and career guidance are the responsibility of local authorities in Norway. They are responsible for building up an information system by registering all adult candidates who have gone through a validation process at upper secondary level in a national, digital registration system. The experience in Denmark has shown that learners and employers are often not well informed about how to gain validation of their non-formal and

informal learning. To overcome this problem it is necessary to make RVA procedures more customer-oriented.

Cultural barriers and education reform

Several cultural barriers have been highlighted in the country case studies. In Portugal, the introduction of RVA, first in adult education and only thereafter through the integration of the adult education and training system into the National Qualifications System, tackled two major misconceptions: the difference in the value of non-formal and informal learning outcomes compared to formal learning outcomes; and the lack of confidence in the quality levels of education and training offered by private providers. The high rates of early school drop-out and of working people with low levels of schooling were challenged by Portugal's New Opportunities Initiative. This brought about a major change in the perception of adult and non-formal education. As a result, non-formal learning outcomes won broader support from other stakeholders: the individual learners most of all, but also from families and companies.

In Namibia, the perception that learning outcomes attained through the conventional system are superior to those attained through open and distance learning settings, workplace experience and general life experience remains a key challenge. In Trinidad and Tobago, the major challenges facing the education institutions are getting commitment from employers in recognising the value of the outcomes of RVA procedures. In the Republic of Korea, society in general excessively values the academic qualifications framework, thus hindering the linkage of the vocational and academic systems, and the linkage of formal and non-formal learning. In India, there is a similar challenge in linking skills frameworks to qualifications frameworks.

Closely related to the cultural barriers are the challenges in the sphere of education and training. Some of these challenges relate to curriculum development integrating non-formal and informal learning. Others, as in the case of France, relate to creating closer links between schools, companies and services. France recommends a revision of the school's fundamental role of transmission and general knowledge build-up towards taking greater account of the learning needs of businesses and services.

In Norway, a major limitation is that many education and training providers in the continuing education and training sector have not yet strongly prioritised RVA. Often there are financial barriers, but there are also cultural barriers and capacity limitations in terms of staff commitment and competences. In Denmark, too, it is felt that it is difficult to convince training providers that RVA can offer a better perspective. There are also individual barriers. It may be a problem that learners and employees are not well informed about their right to RVA services.

In New Zealand and South Africa, the situation is different. Most RVA is undertaken by registered training organisations that fall under the Quality Assurance Framework of their NQFs. Here, it is the technical and vocational providers of education and training that have been most intensively involved in RVA, perhaps because these institutions have the most highly developed outcomes-based curricula, and because their courses are mostly aligned to

skills development in the workplace, allowing the links between the workplace and what is taught in institutions to be acknowledged.

Capacity-building of key actors is a major challenge
In developing countries, especially Afghanistan, Bhutan, Syria and Jordan, where RVA has not yet been developed to its full potential, capacity-building of key actors is a major challenge. The ways forward reported by these countries include the following:
1. Making the existing education and training system respond to the needs of the labour market by increasing industry participation;
2. Introducing notions of progression, and quality assurance mechanisms through NQFs;
3. Developing competence-based programmes and industry-based learning experiences to train and assess students;
4. Developing RVA systems for non-formal education programmes to facilitate progression to post-secondary learning opportunities.

Challenges to skills recognition in the informal economy
The role of the informal sector is in itself a challenge for any national education system, but meeting this challenge is all the more important in countries where the majority of people are employed and trained in the informal sector. In Burkina Faso, Ghana, India and Gambia, the informal economy is the most important source of training. In Gambia, the establishment of the Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework, led by the National Training Authority, which develops skills standards in fields that are important to the Gambian informal economy, has proven successful. In Ghana, the newly proposed National TVET Qualifications Framework fully integrates recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The national standards are based on occupational standards that are demand-oriented. The delivery mode of TVET will be competence-based training and education. The lowest two qualifications, namely Proficiency I and II, recognise the traditional informal apprenticeship, which is a major form of training in the informal economy.

Given the vast amount of learning taking place in the informal sector, more discussion is warranted on the question of how recognition and certification of skills help workers in the informal sector to complete a certification and gain opportunities for further learning and social mobility (Singh 2011).

Challenges facing non-formal basic education
The challenges facing countries with a well-developed system of non-formal education are similar to those of countries with a large informal economy. Countries have reported a need to shift from supply-oriented education to a more demand-oriented non-formal education and training system led by economic stakeholders. In Jordan, non-formal education programmes and training courses for early school leavers are an indispensable part of the education system. However, challenges remain in linking non-formal to formal education and in encouraging governmental and non-governmental organisations to take responsibility for

non-formal education. In Syria, the most notable difficulties facing adult education are the lack of co-operation between local communities and governmental authorities, and between the education sector and the labour market.

In future, it will be necessary for non-formal and informal learning outcomes to be integrated into an NQF and assessed against formal standards. In Ghana, the new national qualifications system will provide RVA of non-formal basic education and adult learning. The National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training will liaise with the non-formal agencies to introduce the learning of relevant trade skills into their training programmes. This will eventually create an opening to link non-formal skills training into the National TVET Qualifications Framework.

Non-formal education and training that is not defined in an NQF but is standardised through a curriculum with equivalency to formal education has in several countries made complementary non-formal education a viable route to basic education. In Jordan, Quest-scope, an international NGO, ensures that non-formal programmes channel drop-outs into a General Equivalency Diploma and also enables other groups of learners in addition to the students from the formal educational system with 10th grade Certificate to progress into the governmental vocational training institutions. Namibia facilitates entry to alternative secondary education for those who cannot be accommodated through the conventional schools because of limited capacity. In Syria, skills-related literacy classes allow adults to sit for an exam, return to mainstream programmes or join technological literacy courses; the latter focus on adult learners' skills and learning via the internet. Much emphasis needs to be placed on the professional development of teachers because they hold the key to linking non-formal and informal learning outcomes to formal ones. Teachers need to be able to understand and assess the many types of learning outcomes with which an individual learner can gain access to a formal learning programme, obtain formal accreditation, or call for career guidance. Teachers need to know how to expand their learning arena from the classroom to other environments, such as the workplace and citizenship activities.

Key lessons
In synthesising the views emerging from the diverse contexts discussed in this book, the following can be said about the common issues for reform and development:

Coordinated frameworks for non-formal learning
Country cases have shown that coordinated frameworks are needed for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the learning and education gained through public, private and NGO training, or for those skills acquired in informal environments that currently go unrecognised. However, frameworks for RVA should not only be oriented to further and higher education, vocational education, and the workplace, but also to basic education and literacy, and to non-governmental organisations and agencies of civil society offering non-formal learning programmes.

Developing target-group-oriented strategies at the macro-level
Where such strategies exist, forms of non-formal and informal learning can grow into high-value educational opportunities that benefit a variety of groups; those who are catching up and need different kinds of complementary programmes; those proceeding up the educational ladder and therefore needing access to certification; those who gained their skills or knowledge outside of the formal sector but who need access to examination or assessment processes by relevant authorities; those who require supplementary programmes in certain subjects; adults who are learning through self-study or distance learning; health workers, temporary teachers, volunteer teachers; and teachers training on the job. Targeting of a specific group (age-related, gender-related, ethnic group, low-skilled workers, etc.) with specific needs, interests and circumstances is useful, not only in reaching those that are disadvantaged, but also to create a demand for RVA.

A national and regional strategy for lifelong learning
A national strategy of lifelong learning should ensure that RVA opens up further learning opportunities to target groups that are currently underrepresented in basic and post-basic education and training.

RVA is first and foremost about the construction of a network of highly diversified non-formal learning programmes and pathways in the public and private education and training sectors. RVA can act as a catalyst for linking peoples' personal learning histories to concrete learning opportunities in formal and non-formal institutions. However, formal education should not constrict or reduce the non-formal to the formal. Rather the distinct and complementary character of the learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning should be defined by a competent authority with the involvement of all stakeholders and sectors, particularly learners and teachers. Developing countries, in which access to education and training is limited, and much responsibility is borne by the non-formal and informal sectors, should ensure that non-formal learning does not lose its traditionally democratic, empowering and humanistic function. The introduction of standards, curricula, learning material and tests for learners should not happen without first raising the expertise level of teachers.

Legislation on RVA is an important element of a lifelong learning strategy
This legislation should have as its main focus the involvement of all stakeholders, especially groups such as employers, ministries other than education, chambers of commerce, unions, civil society agencies, teachers and learners. A partnership agreement with social partners could enhance the use of RVA by creating better opportunities through adult and continuing education programmes. Equally, a strong legal base for RVA should enhance the ability of individuals to make use of further learning opportunities.

RVA can have a strong effect on learning and enhance pedagogical practice in education
Country cases have shown that RVA, being a bottom-up approach, starts with the individual recognising their own potential through the use of generic portfolio formats. In this way, RVA can also serve as a diagnostic test to enable learners to assess their own competences. It also enhances pedagogical practices such as dialogue, interview, self-assessment, systematic reflection and documentation to capture the experiences in question. This generic tool should be accessible and affordable for all who need it.

Much emphasis needs to be placed on the professional development of NQF staff
While shifting to learning outcomes is important, it is also evident that this on its own is not useful unless issues of system inputs – teacher quality, assessor capacity, curriculum, and material production – are dealt with simultaneously. Doing so will improve stakeholder confidence in the parity of outcomes from informal, non-formal and formal settings. In their new role as lifelong learning professionals, teachers should become the ambassadors of an open and accessible learning system that offers learning opportunities to all, for any purpose and in any context and form. It is imperative that teachers are drawn into the debates about NQF–RVA linkages. Professionalization of existing staff in the education system is crucial in guaranteeing better and further linkages between NQFs and RVA; thereby also strengthening the role of RVA in stimulating lifelong learning in non-formal and informal contexts.

Improving the quality of RVA assessors and facilitators
There is need for agreed, non-reductionist accountability processes in the non-formal sector that will allow for learning outcomes from non-formal educational institutions to be translated into 'credits' that are embedded in national qualifications frameworks. This question of accountability depends to a great extent on the quality of the assessors in the RVA process. The focus of accountability should be on relevance, transfer value and content of non-formal learning. By increasing the quality of non-formal learning, we will not only increase its transfer value, but also enrich and reform the formal education sector, which, in its current state, is not meeting even the learning needs of its own clientele.

Improving other forms of learning
Other learning environments and forms of learning must be utilised more effectively, since RVA also shows which learning environment and form of learning is best suited to a particular individual. This could include combinations of on-the-job training, mentoring, tutoring, bridging programmes, independent learning, and distance learning. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes will inevitably lead to an adjustment of the existing qualification frameworks in education and training. Improving opportunities in the non-formal sector by highlighting how a person's existing competences can be deployed and strengthened is an important motivation underlying RVA. It increases the opportunities for the individual in the labour market and in civil society.

The way forward

Taking into account the lessons from the countries analysed in this book, the main way forward will be in collaborative North-South research. The aim of this research will be to analyse:

- Conditions for transfer of good practice;
- The impact of RVA on programmes for poverty reduction and social inclusion through education;
- Distinctive contextual learning needs of different groups;
- Accountability and quality issues in non-formal programmes;
- How to ensure the commitment of government, non-governmental agencies and the private sector to the RVA process.

Clearly, there is a lot to gain from developing and implementing RVA within national contexts, not least in developing and implementing linkages between NQFs and RVA.

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AFRICA

A new paradigm for skills development

Boubakar Savadogo and Richard Walther

Introduction

Nearly half of Burkina Faso's 14 million people live below the poverty line. The economy is scarcely diversified and highly dependent on the agricultural sector, which contributes one-third of national GDP and generates 80 per cent of export earnings (Regional Bureau for West Africa, 2010).

The education system in Burkina Faso is mainly influenced by the education system in France. While certain changes have been incorporated, the basic structure of education borrowed from the French models remains (Maps of World, 2009).

In Burkina Faso education is compulsory for all children (7 to 14 years), but attendance is not enforced (Encyclopaedia of the Nations, 2011). Primary education lasts for six years and secondary for seven years. The latter consists of a general or technical course of study.

The African context of skills development

Because of the dominant role of the informal sector it is also the largest provider of employment. The informal sector accounts for up to 90 per cent of employment in Sub-Saharan Africa and 50 per cent in North Africa. The informal sector is therefore a major contributor to gross domestic product (GDP); between 50 and 60 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (Walther, 2007).

Not only is the informal sector the largest provider of jobs, but it is also the "biggest training provider" (Walther, 2007). Only about 5 per cent of the workforce received formal initial training and the rate of formal continuing training is very low. Most workers receive informal or non-formal training, which includes on-the-job training, self-training and traditional apprenticeships. Given the importance of the informal sector in Burkina Faso, new opportunities for recognising and certifying competences acquired through, traditional apprenticeships are being explored by donor agencies, such as the French Development Agency (ADF) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation(SDC), in collaboration with local professional associations and national authorities. At the same time, efforts are being made to modernise the
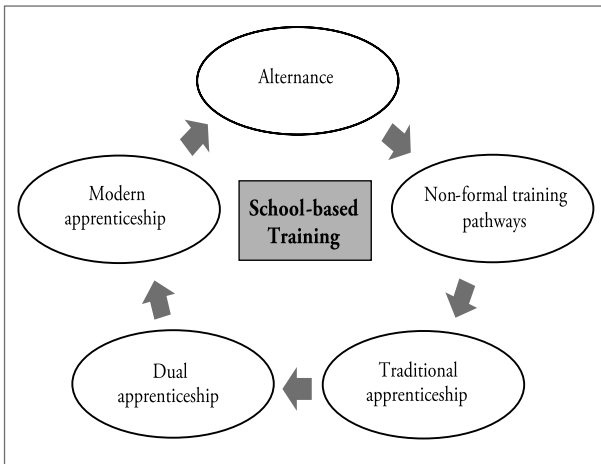
Figure 1.1 The present skills development scheme. Source: Authors.

system of traditional apprenticeships by introducing the dual system of work-related learning combined with theory (Walther & Savadogo, 2010). Due to the dominance of the informal sector, formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET) plays only a minor role in Burkina Faso (UNESCO Africa, 2011). In West and Central Africa only two to five per cent of young people are enrolled in formal TVET at secondary level. Depending on the country, between 60 and 80 per cent of young people are trained through traditional apprenticeships (WB/OECD). Most formally trained young people enter the world of work through informal jobs or activities (national surveys).

In Burkina Faso formal mechanisms to certify or recognise prior experiential learning were introduced in 2006 but concern only a few trades in the informal sector.

Changing the skills development logic

In recent years, the French Agency for Development, in partnership with local NGOs and national authorities, has made efforts to change the current skills development logic from internal efficiency to external efficiency, and move away from the emphasis on the diploma pathway to an emphasis on a skills development pathway (see Figure 1.2).
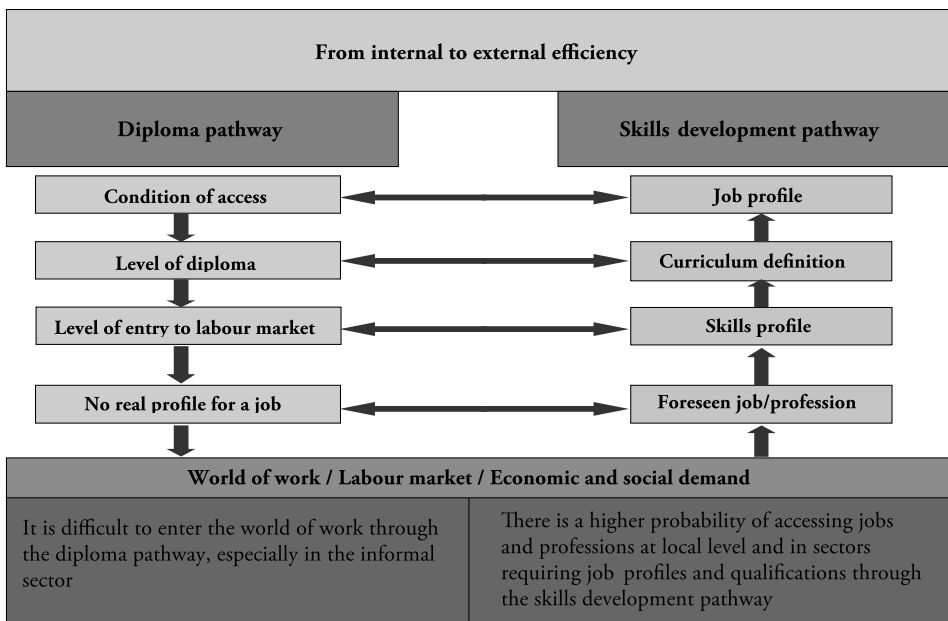
Table 1.2 From diploma to skills development pathway, Source: Authors.

**Partner-driven
Public-private partnership
National qualifications framework**

Integrated skills development system

TVET/Diversity of initial and continuing training paths

Equity of access and outcomes

In response to development needs	In response to the need for equity of
● local	● poorly educated people
● sector-wide	● girls/woman
● rural	● rural population
● global	● post-conflict population

Figure 1.3 Integrated Skills Development System. Source: Authors.

Towards a new paradigm of skills development

Given the high importance of the informal education sector for the economy, donor agencies and national stakeholders have suggested developing a new paradigm of skills development. This would entail a shift from a centralised and state-controlled system to a decentralised, regulated and partnership-based system; from a 'diploma oriented system' to a system having as its target the inclusion of youth; a shift from a formal TVET system to a system integrating the diversity of the formal, non-formal and informal pathways; from a school-based training to skills development pathways based on apprenticeship and dual learning; from a knowledge-based national certification framework to one recognising and validating all types of skills and work experiences; and, finally, a shift from a school-based system that largely excludes the informal economy, to a skills-development system based on equity of access and outcomes.

The new paradigm suggests a shift from a narrow system to one that specifically targets development needs on a local, sector-wide, rural and global level. It would also promote the transition from an unequal system to one of equity for poorly educated people, including girls and women, the rural and post-conflict populations.

Training pathways in the national qualifications framework

The new paradigm of skills development will include several training pathways incorporated within the national qualifications framework. The provision of school-based training is a crucial

part of the paradigm. Additionally, alternance training and apprenticeship training will also be included. Skills gained non-formally and informally need to be recognised. Finally, integration with the labour market and professionalisation has to take place.

Given the importance of the informal sector in Burkina Faso, the major priority is to shift to a framework for recognising and validating all types of skills and work experiences within a national qualifications framework that includes several training pathways.

School based training

Alternance training/ apprenticeship

National Qualifications Framework

Recognition of the skills acquired non formally and informally

Insertion and professionalization
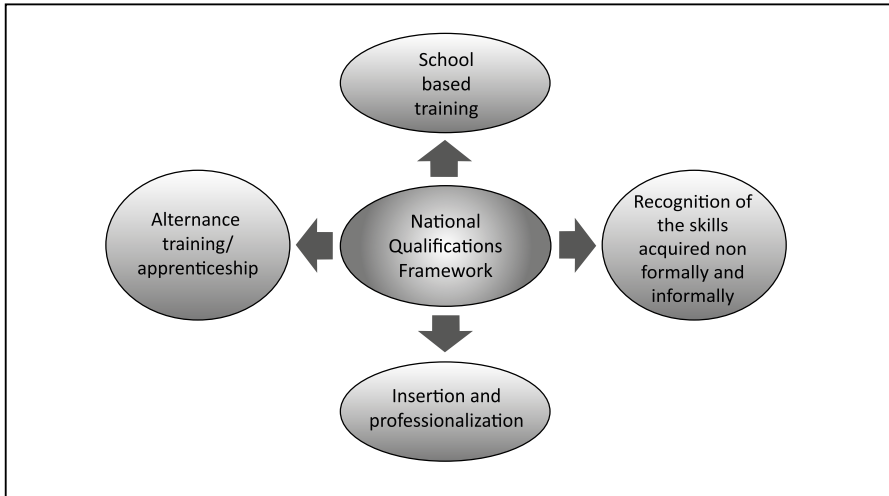
Table 1.4 Training pathways in a national qualifications framework, Source: Authors.

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GSQF and recognition of non-formal and informal learning

Saffiatou Savage-Sidibeh

Introduction

Mindful of Gambia's vision for 2020, the poverty reduction strategy paper and the current education policy covering 2004–2015 are envisaged in the Education for All (EFA) National Plan. The aim of this plan is for all young people and adults to be given the opportunity to gain the knowledge and develop the values, attitudes and skills that will enable them to build their capacities to work, participate fully in society, take control of their own lives, and continue learning (ESSP, 2006).

The development of key skills in Gambia is crucial to the eradication of poverty and the economic development of the country. While there is a high rate of illiteracy and a high proportion of early school leavers, there are a great many apprentices who develop skills but receive little income for their competences. These skills are not validated through certification due to the absence of an institutionalised system.

Gambia skills qualifications framework (GSQF)

The national system of skills standards and qualifications is known as the Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF). This is a partial qualification framework concerned with technical, vocational and literacy skills. The GSQF is embedded in the realities and needs of The Gambia, "reflecting the skill standards needed to support human resource development across all economic sectors; being a simple and sustainable system; providing standards that can support initial and continuous vocational training; including learners with low literacy levels" (GSQF 2006:6). The system includes formal and informal learning of skills, post-school college or institution- based, on-the-job learning, and full-time and part-time learning, and is therefore an integrated framework.

Key features of the GSQF (2006) are: learning outcomes from skill standards, rather than input developed syllabi; occupational competence based on the ability to do a job; assessments that are benchmarked against that competence, rather than exams; and international best practice.

The development of the Gambia Skills Qualification Framework (GSQF) was led by the National Training Authority (NTA) in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental institutions to ensure that the process is participatory and broad-based (Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment, 2010). The National Training Authority Act 2002 gives the NTA the mandate to provide a system to regulate national vocational qualifications (GSQF, 2006). The NTA Board and five pilot standard panels were created for this purpose. The institutions involved were Gambia College, Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI), the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), the Department of State for Agriculture, and the Gambia Hotel Association (GHA). The Adult and Non-formal Education Unit (ANFEU), the Basic and Secondary Education Directorate, and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education also implemented major strategies and mechanisms for recognition.

Major strategies and mechanisms for recognition

The development of the GSQF policy document recognises the need for accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Quality assurance policy guidelines for assessment have yet to be developed. A major challenge for the GSQF assessment policy is to create a culture where qualifications are only awarded to those who have met the performance criteria set by the skill standards, thus ensuring that the awards are valued and respected. The majority of training provided in The Gambia at present is formal or informal initial vocational education and training. The trainees will need recognition of their training to help them find employment (GSQF, 2006, p. 37). Panels have been already set up for the development of demand-led standards. Stakeholders will need to be identified from different fields of learning to form a training-led body.

The classification of the skill fields is an integral part of the quality assurance system for the GSQF. A classification system with 13 fields of learning has been developed for the GSQF to enable people to locate unit standards and qualifications within different economic fields, sub-fields and domains (GSQF, 2006, p. 15). This classification system is also used to specify which fields training providers and/or assessment administration centres wish to be accredited for. Trainers and assessors can also be accredited to train and assess different parts of the framework. Stakeholders from each field of learning are invited by the Board of the NTA to form a lead body (LB). This represents stakeholders from the sub-fields, as well as large and small enterprises. The LBs are also responsible for skills training and qualifications development within their economic field (GSQF, 2006). The LB prepare a draft skill standard and develop a structure for the GSQF, with the aim of fostering a dissemination process. The majority of the unit standards will involve practical skills training. This takes place in three locations: the training centre, the formal workplace and the informal workplace. The GSQF assesses the skills acquired through developing and attending a training course, working on-the-job for a number of years and a mixture of the above (The GSQF Blueprint, 2006). This means that the GSQF can only assess and reflect a candidate's theoretical and practical knowledge of the skill and the initial stages of practical skills acquisition.

With regard to recognition, occupations have to be selected and level(s) need to be covered. Currently the GSQF has qualifications at four main levels, from 1 to 4. "As the level increases, so the trainee is expected to take on more responsibility, the job becomes more demanding and the tasks themselves become less routine" (GSQF, 2006, p. 19).

Preparing a draft skill standard

A structure of GSQF qualifications needs to be developed. The level descriptors in the GSQF qualifications reflects the learners' needs: gaining self-development skills (learning to learn); gaining employability skills (sector/occupational skills); and gaining transferable entrepreneurial work-based skills (improving the business) (GSQF, 2006).

Organisation of the assessment process

It is assumed that each training provider and employer has a trained and accredited assessor-trainer to carry out the continuous assessment based on the unit standards. An additional person is tasked with assessing, independently of the assessor-trainers, whether a candidate

has met the criteria necessary to gain a specified award. These individuals, known as assessor-verifiers are trained and accredited by the NTA to check the method of practical assessment, sample levels of performance against the performance criteria of the unit standards, and check the gathering of evidence (GSQF, 2006).

With regard to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), Gambia has recently prepared a policy document under the auspices of the NTA to regulate national vocational qualifications and co-ordinate the quality of delivery of TVET (GSQF 2006, p. 5). Assessments are benchmarked against competence rather than exams, and occupational competence is based on knowledge and ability to perform a certain job.

Adults and non-formal education programmes are implemented by NGOs, community-based organisations and civil society organisations. A number of organisations have their programmes coordinated by ANFEU. However, there is no standard mechanism or systems yet in place for recognition, validation and *accreditation* of informal adult education. The ANFEU has, in collaboration with the Community Skills Improvement Project, developed and validated literacy learners' assessment tools. Most of the literacy providers were involved in the process with a view to ensuring that the tools could be adaptable to all. This is a milestone achievement towards putting in place a universal set of tools for assessing non-formal learning and experience (UIE 2006, p. 3).

Impacts and challenges

The GSQF assessment policy was launched in November 2006. Standards were developed in 23 fields particularly relevant to the economy of The Gambia. In total, over 150 occupational standards have been developed.

Some of the standards have been turned into a teaching curriculum to assist training providers with the dissemination process. Five occupational qualification standards with key skills have been piloted in two institutions. This is now being implemented in five institutions, including the Gambia Technical Training Institute, the Besse Training Centre and the Njawara Training Centre. Assessment and certification offices are being set up to conduct assessment and certification. Trainers and assessors have been registered and accredited.

If the GSQF is to become a fully national educational qualifications framework for The Gambia, then this aim needs to be planned and implemented incrementally. The qualifications framework needs to be aligned to other training policies – with the Adult Literacy policy, Apprenticeship policy and with the national economic development project proposals. A major challenge will be to take up certification achievements through an awarding body. The coordination of the GSQF will require the development of an autonomously functioning Skills Development Fund to finance the development of qualifications and unit standards; provide training on these qualifications and unit standards, and provide training of trainers and assessors. Adequate motivation for panellists and capacity-building for all key actors needs to be targeted.

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Integrating non-formal and informal learning into the new TVET Qualifications Framework

Daniel Baffour-Awuah

Introduction

The Ghanaian education system is undergoing a reform. However, the current mainstream formal education and training reforms are neither competency based (CBT) nor outcomes-based. On the other hand, technical and vocational education training (TVET) reform is CBT-based and is also applying the outcomes-based concept. The proposed CBT programme is a new modular, outcomes-based qualification approach, developed by the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET) in partnership with leading employers, initially as a pilot programme for the mechanical trades and later implemented across a wide variety of trades to provide the kind of recruits that industry and commerce require.

Industry will participate fully in an education and training-business partnership in many ways; through the Industry Training Advisory Board (ITAB) and its sub-committees, through validation panels, through external verifiers, and through the voluntary cooperation of learners. This broad involvement will ensure that the new programmes enhance the economic and industrial value of the qualifications by influencing their content, context and delivery, as well as ensuring a rapid response to technological change.

Employers acknowledge benefits through the improvement and development of Ghana's human and social capital as an essential prerequisite to competing successfully in economic globalisation. The new modular qualifications are expected to greatly expand access through a flexible mode of delivery, allowing employees to develop their skills in a cost-effective way through day-release and evening classes. Other benefits are envisaged through industrial attachments for institutional staff and secondments from industry to institutions.

Two parallel systems exist, one for general education and the other for the TVET system. There is no national qualification framework (NQF) in Ghana covering the whole education and training system.

Table 3.1 shows the qualification framework for the general education system. All qualifications are for the formal education sector with the exception of basic education, where adult education is delivered in non-formal mode.

National TVET qualifications framework (NTVETQF)

Currently Ghana proposed a new national TVET qualifications framework to harmonise all existing TVET qualifications. The NTVETQF shown in Table 3.2 recommends a nine-level national TVET qualifications framework. Levels 1 and 2, covering informal apprenticeship, are the lowest and the least demanding, while level 9 (doctorate in technology) is the highest and the most demanding.

Existing qualifications	Level	Status
Basic Education Certificate of Education	Primary/Junior High (9 years)	Formal/Non-formal
Senior High School Certificate	Secondary education	Formal
Diploma	Tertiary education	Formal
Bachelor's degree	Tertiary education	Formal
Master's degree	Tertiary education	Formal
Ph.D.	Tertiary education	Formal

Table 3.1 National General Education Qualifications System Source: Ministry of Education, 2010.

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is fully integrated in this NTVETQF because it is based on national standards and learning outcomes. The national standards are based on occupational standards which are demand-oriented. The delivery mode of TVET will be competency-based training and education. The curriculum will be modularised or unitised, therefore making it amenable to both formal and non-formal delivery. The lowest two qualifications, namely Proficiency I and II, recognise the traditional informal apprenticeship, which is a major factor in the education and training system.

Rationale for the design of the new national TVET qualifications framework
The proposed COTVET National TVET Qualification Framework was the result of a consultation process involving all TVET stakeholders. The following objectives guided the proposal for the creation of a National TVET Qualification Framework:
- To bring all post-basic occupation-oriented qualifications into a unified qualification framework;
- To facilitate access to further education and training for individuals in technical and vocational occupations;
- To improve product and service quality by ensuring uniform standards of practice in the trades and professions;
- To promote and facilitate access to life-long learning for all, especially those working in the informal sector of the economy.

Level	Qualification	Status	Certifying institution
8	Doctor of Technology	Formal	none
7	Master of Technology	Formal	none
6	Bachelor of Technology	Formal	Polytechnics
5	Higher National Diploma	Formal	Polytechnics
4	Certificate II	Formal	GES-TVET Inst.
3	Certificate I	Formal	GES-TVET Inst.
2	Proficiency II	Informal/Non-Formal	NVTI/Informal trade associations
1	Proficiency I	Informal/Non-Formal	NVTI/Informal trade associations

Table 3.2 Proposed National TVET Qualifications Framework. Source: COTVET/JICA TVETS CBT Manual, 2009.

These new qualifications are designed to be certified at nine levels: Proficiency I, Proficiency II, Certificate I, Certificate II, Higher National Diploma (HND) and Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech.), Master of Technology and Doctor of Technology. These levels take into account the realities of education and training in Ghana, the structure of the labour force, existing qualification systems, projections into the future, and what is manageable at the present time. The levels will be subject to change over time, as is the practice in countries that currently operate National TVET Qualification Frameworks.

Coordination and governance of the qualifications frameworks
The coordination and governance of the General Education Qualification Framework is within the ambit of the Ministry of Education. However, tertiary qualifications are coordinated by the National Council on Tertiary Education (NCTE) and the National Accreditation Board (NAB), which are semi-autonomous organisations under the Ministry. The NCTE mainly has financial authority to approve programmes for the public universities, while the NAB accredits programmes for both public and private tertiary institutions. In this way, the NAB plays the role as a quality assurance body.

Transferability from one programme into another is difficult across institutions because many of the programmes do not carry credits. Often where a credit system exists, the credits are not transferable from from one institution to another. In short, within general education there is no nationally agreed policy of transferability.

The proposed national TVET qualifications framework will be governed and coordinated by the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET). COTVET is answerable to a 15-member board made up of stakeholders from various sectors, including industry. This council is also semi-autonomous under the Ministry of Education but has responsibility for coordinating TVET programmes under other ministries as well as the private TVET institutions.

COTVET has five standing committees: the Industry Trade Advisory Committee (ITAC), responsible for national occupational standards development; the National Training Quality Assurance Committee (NTQAC), responsible for quality assurance and accreditation; and the National TVET Qualification Framework Committee (NTVETQFC), with oversight responsibility for the TVET qualification framework; the National Apprenticeship Committee (NAC); and the Skills Development Fund Committee.

Unlike the general education qualification framework, the TVET framework is designed to allow transferability and unhindered progression from the lowest to the highest qualification for all TVET qualifications. Secondly, it offers learners who choose to go through the TVET pathway an opportunity to get to the highest level (Figure 3.1) just as in general education.

Lifelong learning

There is no specific policy or legislation on lifelong learning. However, one of the objectives of the NTVETQF is to encourage lifelong learning. Because of the flexibility of the curriculum (i.e., modularised and unitised), and delivery modes (qualifications can be offered both in institutions and at the workplace) it should have the effect of encouraging and promoting lifelong learning. Skilled employees in industry who want to acquire new knowledge and skills to keep up with changes in technology will have an opportunity to access specific modules. Again, the NTVETQF will allow for assessment of new skills and knowledge acquired on the job for recognition and certification.

Recognition practices

Within the general education qualification framework recognition is summative and linked to the framework through formal assessment or examination. With the TVETQF room has been made for recognition of prior learning based on specific learning outcomes. Since the delivery modes under this framework include the workplace and the informal sector, assessment may take different forms, including portfolio gathering, performance evidence at one's workplace, and formal written evidence.

Informal learning will be accommodated under the framework and will be assessed using national standards developed for the specific trade and level of training. It must be emphasised that there will not be any difference in the assessment of competencies required by the level of qualification. Everyone, whether in the formal, non-formal or informal programmes, will have to achieve the competencies required for the qualification. The methods of assessing the competencies may differ but the requirement to meet the set standard remains the same.

Non-formal education

The Ministry of Education has an agency which deals with non-formal education and training, mainly for adult learners. Their certification is not linked to the formal education system. The new national qualifications system will be responsible for the recognition, validation and

assessment of such education and training. The council will liaise with non-formal agencies to introduce the learning of relevant skill trades into their training programmes. This will eventually link non-formal skills training to the national TVET qualifications framework.

Methodology
As indicated above, many tools are used for identification, documentation, validation and accreditation of competences under the NTVET qualifications framework. Some of these involve portfolio, interview and demonstration/performance. In addition, methods of recognition of prior learning (RPL) will be used to place and certify learners. The RPL policy is under discussion. In addition, the framework stipulates certain credits for workplace experience that will count towards certification.

Impacts, benefits and challenges
The challenges in Ghana are related to different areas. Funding for implementing the framework is a problem. Industry participation is limited, because of lack of capacity for industry to participate fully (i.e., assist in developing CBT programmes, provide industrial experience, and train and assess students). Lack of relevant and adequate infrastructure and equipment in the TVET institutions is an additional problem, as are lack of trained instructors to deliver the competency-based programmes, coordination problems across different ministries implementing TVET programmes, and the limited participation of development partners.

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The Mauritian model of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Kaylash Allgoo

Introduction

In the wake of globalisation, reform in the education and training system has been a concern of governments internationally. Education and training cannot be reduced to a mere promoter of economic development; rather, it is an important catalyst for the future of the nation, a key pillar to the economy, an instrument for development. The strength of a nation greatly depends on the ability of its people to acquire and apply knowledge. The Mauritian government, like many other countries across the globe, has had to review its strategic planning and approach to the skills and knowledge of its labour force to adapt to fast-changing societal landscapes. The need to meet the challenges of globalisation and the development of the education and training sector converged in the construction of the national qualifications framework (NQF), an overarching structure to embrace both the traditional and vocational education and training routes to encourage and facilitate mobility of students and workers alike. But more importantly, the NQF ensures the fluid progression of the learner, contributing to the concept of lifelong learning, a crucial tool in the empowerment of the labour force to adapt and re-adapt itself to meet the rapidly changing demands of the economic market.

By encompassing formal, non-formal and informal learning, the NQF also acts as an enabler for recognition of prior learning (RPL). RPL has been identified as one of the key elements of human resource development practice, which enables not only the up-skilling of the labour force but also the re-inclusion of people into the education and training system, by recognising the skills, knowledge and experiences obtained outside the formal system. This helps to develop a new generation of human resources which are more enterprising and innovative, flexible and multi-skilled.

The national qualifications framework

One of the objectives of the 2001 Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act (MQA) is to develop, implement and maintain the national qualifications framework (NQF). The NQF is a ten-level framework ranging from the Certificate of Primary Education at Level One up to a PhD at Level Ten. It comprises three strands; namely, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and tertiary education. This tripartite structure allows for the integration of academic and vocational awards and includes all stages of education and training from primary schooling to higher education. In addition, each level of the NQF is described by associated level descriptors, which gives further transparency to the framework and guides individuals in their choice of training and career.

The MQA holds the dual role of regulator of the TVET sector and the guardian of the NQF. Education and training development is a complex and ambitious endeavour. Cooperation and capacity building are key factors in moving towards an integrated and re-energised system. To achieve significant improvement, MQA has solicited various key players in the education and training sector to pave the way. The development of qualifications, which will lead to clearer learning pathways for all learners, is carried out by industrial training advisory

committees (ITACs) comprising experts from both the public and private sectors. For example, the MQA has worked with the Mauritius Institute of Health (MIH) to develop qualifications in the health and social care sector. Such collaborations have been consolidated over the years and a sustainable relationship has been built with the stakeholders involved. The role of the ITAC is a complex one given that they have to ensure that the qualifications being generated are of high-quality, nationally relevant and internationally comparable. In short, they have to make sure that the qualifications are 'fit for purpose' and comply with the expectations of the industry. Thus far, MQA has set up 19 ITACs and two additional committees and, to date, some 117 qualifications together with 3,582 unit standards have been developed in various sectors; in agriculture, automotive industry, adult literacy, beauty care and hairdressing, building construction and civil works, early childhood education and care, electrical and electronics engineering, furniture making, handicrafts, health and social care, ICT, jewellery, language, management, mechanical engineering, printing, seafood and marine industry, textiles and apparel, tourism and hospitality, and transport and logistics. It is worth mentioning that the NQF qualifications are offered by both public and private providers.

LEV-EL	PRIMARY / SECOND-ARY EDUCATION	TVET / WORKPLACE	**TERTIARY EDUCATION**
10			Doctorate
9			Master's Degrees e.g., M.A., M.Sc., M.Phil. Postgraduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diplomas
8			Bachelor with honours, conversion programmes
7			Bachelor (ordinary degree)
6		Diploma	Diploma
5	HSC/GCE 'A' Level/ BAC/IBAC	Certificate	Certificate
4			
3	SC/GCE 'O' Level		
2	Form III NCA		
1	Certificate of Primary Education		

Table 4.1 The Mauritius National Qualifications Framework. Source: Allgoo, 2007.

The NQF is also used for quality assurance purposes; namely registration of trainers and training institutions, managers, programme officers and trainers. Furthermore, MQA ensures accreditation of award courses through a three-stage process as follows: 1) Preparation of a self evaluation report by the training institution based on criteria defined by the MQA; 2) validation of the report by a team appointed by the MQA through an on-site visit; and 3) accreditation recommendation by the accreditation committee and approval by the Director of the MQA. In addition, the NQF is also used for recognition and equivalence of qualifications where qualifications both local and foreign are pitched on the NQF.

MQA also approves non-award courses intended to upgrade the skills and employability of Mauritians. Approval of non-award courses not only ensures the quality of education and training offered, but also strengthens and encourages the concept of continual learning.

Lifelong learning

The successful implementation of RPL has helped bridge the gap between lifelong learning and the existing skills of the workforce. RPL candidates are now being awarded NQF qualifications through the certification system established by the NQF. As such, formal, informal and non-formal learning have been made official parts of the Mauritian education and training system, enhancing the culture for lifelong learning. In line with the government's vision for lifelong learning, the MQA introduced the concept of RPL into the Mauritian system. One of the main functions of the MQA is 'to recognise and validate competencies for the purpose of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems'. This is achieved through the implementation of RPL, which acts as a mechanism for inclusion by offering access to those people who were previously left outside the mainstream education system. RPL, thus, renders visible and rewards an individual's knowledge and skills arising from any kind of learning environment, allowing them greater mobility within the labour market.

Undoubtedly, such an initiative draws people back into the education and training system, thus providing Mauritius with a qualified labour force and paving the way for lifelong learning. In its endeavour to promote RPL and Lifelong learning, the MQA has collaborated with various institutions. Currently three major national institutions are recognised as awarding bodies; the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD), the Mauritius Institute of Health (MIH) for technical and vocational qualifications, and the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate (MES). Though the role of the Mauritian NQF is undoubtedly to facilitate the inclusion of qualifications on the framework, in view of creating pathways and offering more opportunities to learners, the MQA is also fully committed to developing an educated and informed nation which will act as a key driver in the development of the country.

Recognition practices

Since the official launch of RPL in June 2009, 49 candidates have received either a full or partial nationally recognised qualification. The next RPL assessment is scheduled in September 2011. The MQA has to date received approximately 100 applications from different sectors. In addition, the MQA is working on an RPL project with the Mauritius Prisons Service for

the reintegration of detainees through RPL. Given the encouraging response from the sectors of tourism, construction, printing, plumbing and pipe fitting, RPL will be extended to other trades this year, notably adult literacy, spray painting, panel beating, automotive mechanics and electricians.

The RPL model has been widely accepted by all stakeholders. For instance, employers have accepted the RPL approach since it provides them with qualified and well-motivated personnel. Additionally, some trade unions have responded positively to RPL as the experience of their members is recognised. Given that the pathways for further learning have been clearly defined, some trade unions have shown even greater interest in the system. On the other hand, RPL would not have been possible without the vital role played by Ministry of Education and Human Resources in supporting this initiative.

Non-formal education

The Mauritian NQF has proved to be a valuable tool in improving the transparency and visibility of non-formal and informal learning outcomes by ensuring greater coordination between education, training and the world of work.

In Mauritius, there are around 457 training providers registered with the MQA, offering award and non-award TVET programmes. Award programmes are in general delivered through the normal route and an apprenticeship mode. Both award and non-award programmes are intended to increase employability, aid personal and career development, and to lead to qualifications. It is to be noted that local qualifications are developed by the MQA and are constantly updated and reviewed.

Learning can be in the form of formal, non-formal and informal learning. In recent years, however, there has been a growing appreciation of the learning from non-formal and informal settings. These are now also seen as crucial for the realisation of lifelong learning, thus requiring new strategies for identification and validation of these informal learning outcomes. Non-formal learning may not be provided by an educational or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. In general, non-formal and informal learning occur in different modes. These are on the job training, training and placement of people in organisations, and daily activities related to work, family life, social activities and leisure. A large percentage of the Mauritian labour force has built their careers through apprenticeship without having undergone any academic or formal training. Such experiences are catered for through the qualifications being developed under the NQF, which are built on unit standards. In general, an NQF qualification comprises on average of 25 unit standards. Each unit standard is developed for a specified level of the NQF and defines the depth and breadth of the subject matter.

With a view to recognising the past experience of people, the knowledge, skills, competences, attitude, know-how, performance and experience acquired informally are matched against unit standards and qualifications developed under the NQF. By satisfying the outcome requirements of the overall qualification applicants are able to acquire either a full formal qualification or a record of learning through RPL.

RPL model: three stages

In 2007 the MQA, with the assistance of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), carried out a sensitisation campaign on RPL at national level, in which major stakeholders were exposed to international RPL best practices and were given insight into the various benefits of implementing RPL at a national level. Subsequently, with the assistance of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), MQA developed its policy on RPL and conducted a pilot project. It is to be noted that L'Academié de La Reunion is contributing to the RPL project by training the key personnel.

The RPL model as set up by the MQA comprises three stages: 1) The pre-screening process; 2) the facilitation process; and 3) the assessment process. Once a candidate makes an application for RPL to the MQA, the application is pre-screened. Following a successful outcome in the pre-screening exercise, an RPL facilitator, registered with the MQA, is assigned to the RPL candidate. The facilitator guides the RPL candidate to build his/her portfolio within a period of three months. The portfolio is a collection of evidence, comprising personal details, employment history, evidence of skills and knowledge, non-formal courses, life-experience learning, community and voluntary activities, and relevant experience in the selected trade.

The evidence to be submitted may comprise any or all of the following: statements of results of formal education; sample of work produced; performance appraisal reports; references from current or previous employers; job descriptions; details of formal training, seminars, conferences and workshops attended which are relevant to the RPL application; certificates of participation/achievements/awards; letters of recommendation; video tapes, tape recordings and/or photographs of work activities; specific details of work and/or participation in projects; and written testimonials from managers or colleagues.

Once the portfolio has been completed, the RPL candidate then submits it to the MQA, and it is forwarded to the awarding body for assessment. The assessment is carried out through an interview and at the end of the process, the RPL candidate either obtains a full qualification, no qualification or a partial qualification, known as a record of learning.

Impact

In addition, RPL acts as a feeder to further and higher education, thereby expanding educational and employment opportunities for the individual and increasing gross enrolment ratio at tertiary level. It also helps to alleviate poverty by increasing employability. Therefore, RPL contributes to the social and economic development of the nation. This new system will also help in reducing the number of illiterate people. Those people will be able to continue with their studies and not only climb the social ladder, but also they climb the ladders of the NQF.

Challenges

Mauritius is currently witnessing a major reform in the TVET sector. People who were out of the education and training system can now re-enter the system without starting at the lowest level. By having their experience validated, they acquire qualifications from Level 2 to Level 4 of the NQF. This boosts their self-esteem and further promotes lifelong learning.

In the next phase of consolidation of the Mauritian NQF and RPL, the MQA is intensifying its efforts to increase public awareness of the benefits of NQF and the RPL. This will entail holding seminars and conferences across Mauritius and Rodrigues, as well publishing press adverts, pamphlets and brochures. The maintenance of the Mauritian NQF itself is a core priority of the MQA, especially if the framework is to assist Mauritius in becoming a 'knowledge economy'.

Funding has been a major issue. The pilot projects were funded by the National Empowerment Foundation. In addition, taking into consideration the low income of prospective RPL candidates, the fees have been subsidised. Training of RPL facilitators and assessors is an on-going exercise to implement RPL in all sectors. Awareness campaigns are also organised throughout the island to inform the public about the development and benefits of the NQF and RPL.

On the other hand, harmonisation of qualification frameworks is becoming crucial around the globe. In this context, mutual recognition of qualifications is rapidly becoming a necessity. With a view to promoting this, the MQA has signed memorandums of technical co-operation with Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles, Ghana and The Gambia. In order to consolidate mutual recognition, the MQA is working in close collaboration with countries in the African region through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The VUSSC is an initiative of ministers of education of small states. Its main objective is to build human resource capacity in small commonwealth countries, to stimulate an increase in the courses offered in these countries, and to create a mechanism to transfer credits and qualified people across borders.

At the international level, the MQA has been selected as the lead organisation in implementing RPL in Commonwealth African countries by the Commonwealth of Learning. Several meetings have been conducted with representatives in Ghana, Namibia, Zambia and Kenya. In addition, representatives of the Namibian training authority recently visited the MQA to learn about the methodologies that the MQA has put in place.

The Director of the MQA is currently chairing the management committee of the transnational qualifications framework (TQF). RPL is an important component in the TQF procedures and policies, which were launched last year.

Questions are often raised about how education can become more relevant to the world of work and how vocationally oriented training can become more valued. The Mauritian NQF promotes the integration of both education and training. If the skills crisis, unemployment and the problem of lack of social mobility in Mauritius are to be solved, vocational and occupation-based qualifications must escape from the stigma of being for people of 'lesser intelligence'. There is a need to find ways of raising the 'positional good' of the Mauritian NQF qualifications. It is time to identify and overcome the barriers to progress, to plan the evolution of the Mauritian qualification framework and of the wider education and training system. This will not be possible without deliberate, sustained effort from all involved and will have to take place at all levels of education and training.

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Challenges of implementing the RPL policy

Heroldt V. Murangi

Introduction

Namibia has an area of 824,300 square kilometres and has a population of approximately two million. The majority (65 per cent) of the population is based in the rural areas, particularly in the northern part of the country. Namibia gained its independence from the colonial South African regime and became a democratic nation in 1990.

Prior to the country's independence the education system was based on the policy of Apartheid[1] and was fragmented along racial and tribal lines, comprising three separate systems (for whites, coloureds and blacks). These were characterised by gross inequalities in the allocation of resources, thereby depriving many Namibians of the right to education. Education for the minority whites was compulsory and free; however, blacks had to pay, and it was not compulsory. Schools for blacks were largely characterised by unqualified teachers and large class sizes. The inequality in the education system inherited from the colonial regime was one of many major challenges confronting the new government. With independence, large-scale educational reform was undertaken, with the aim of ensuring an inclusive, fair and learner-centred education system. A policy directive entitled, 'Towards Education for All: A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training' was adopted. This directive highlighted the four development goals of access, equality, quality and democracy, and gave lifelong learning special significance for the education sector Namibia. The culture of lifelong learning will help the people to respond rapidly to the challenges the country faces. Other educational reforms that address the imbalances of the past include the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training of 1999 and the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) of 2005.

Lifelong learning

According to the Presidential Commission of 1999, lifelong learning should be adopted as a guiding principle in education provision, since formal education alone would not be able to achieve the required level of human resource development. Every institution should see itself as a lifelong learning institution. ETSIP is intended to strengthen the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of education and training systems at all levels. According to ETSIP, a weak education and training system cannot facilitate the attainment of the national development goals; hence, all training providers should create an enabling environment that will promote lifelong learning opportunities for all citizens (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The provision of education through the distance-learning mode was seen as the best way to expand access and promote lifelong learning. As a result, legislation was enacted in 1997 to establish the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). The NAMCOL Act required the college to provide study opportunities for adults and out-of-school youth to

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[1] Apartheid refers to the system that separated the different races and ethnic groups, giving privileges to the whites and discriminating against all other races and ethnic groups.

		Certificates	Diplomas	Degrees	
NQF Levels	10			**Degrees**	Doctoral Degree
	9		**Diplomas**		Master's Degree
	8	**Certificates**			Honours Bachelor's Degree Professional Bachelor's Degree
	7				Ordinary (3-Year) Bachelor's Degree
	6				HE Diploma
	5				HE Certificate
	4				Grade 12 Certificate
	3				Grade 10 Certificate
	2				Upper Primary Adult Upper Primary
	1				Lower Primary

Figure 5.1 The Namibia National Qualifications Framework.

upgrade their professional and vocational skills, as well as their level of general education (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1997). Similarly, institutions of higher learning are required to facilitate access for some students through open and distance learning programmes. The Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia and the Centre for Open and Lifelong Learning at the Polytechnic of Namibia also offer tertiary education programmes through the distance-learning mode of study.

The concept of lifelong learning is misunderstood by many. It is often linked to adult education or to any training that takes place outside the conventional school environment. Lifelong learning is an on-going process whereby an individual acquires a set of competences through continuous development of knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout life. Lifelong learning occurs through formal (conventional school environment), non-formal (any structured learning taking place outside the conventional system), and informal (taking place in any context) interventions. The lifelong learning process can therefore take place at any time and in any place, 'from cradle to grave'. Immediately after independence the government of the Republic of Namibia recognised that the acquisition of knowledge and skills cannot be confined to a specific time and place. The government is of the opinion that developmental challenges, such as unemployment, poverty, social inequalities and HIV/AIDS, can be addressed through lifelong learning initiatives. ETSIP, therefore, recommends the development of a national lifelong learning policy for Namibia to create a culture in which all Namibians have the desire and the opportunity to continuously develop their knowledge and skills, thus enhancing their quality of life. The development of the lifelong learning policy is in line with the Ministry of Education's mission to ensure that all Namibian residents have equitable access to quality education programmes that will enable them to acquire the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes required throughout their lifetimes.

A consultative process was followed in the drafting of the policy, and existing government policies and legislative documents were reviewed. Learning providers, employers, the Namibia qualifications authority, non-governmental organisations, private sector companies and trade unions were among the key stakeholders consulted. A consultative forum involving all stakeholders took place to review the draft policy document, and the final draft was submitted to the Minister of Education for consideration. The draft policy document expresses the need to establish a lifelong learning forum that will bring together all key stakeholders from the various sectors to oversee the implementation of the policy.

The Namibian qualifications system
The Namibia qualifications authority (NQA) was established as a statutory body through Act 29 of 1996 to oversee the implementation and development of the national qualifications framework. The mandate of the NQA is to set standards and qualifications, provide quality assurance, accreditation, assessment and validation of qualifications, including recognition of prior learning (Government of the Republic of Namibia, 1996). In 2006, the national qualifications framework (NQF) was created to regulate qualifications in the education and training sector. The NQF intends to impose consistency in the qualifications provided by different institutions in the education and training sector. It facilitates vertical and horizontal articulation between the education and training systems. The NQF promotes the consistent use of qualification titles and provides a clear understanding of what a person holding a particular qualification or who has attained knowledge and skills through workplace experience or general life experience has achieved (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2006). The NQF allows students to make informed decisions on qualifications by comparing the levels of different qualifications.

The NQF comprises 10 levels, covering all stages of learning, including secondary, vocational education and training and higher education. The key objective of the NQF is to determine what a person can do rather than what he or she has on a certificate. Each level is defined through a set of descriptions. Level descriptors are statements that describe characteristics of qualifications at a particular level on the NQF (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2006).

Accredited institutions are required to register all qualifications they award in the national qualifications framework. Learning outcomes required for successful completion of any qualification must be clearly stated when registering qualifications in the framework.

For some qualifications the learning outcomes are expressed as unit standards, which can be awarded independently of any qualification. The unit standards signify that the person has been finally assessed and has attained a nationally agreed standard of performance. People, therefore, receive recognition for completion of a whole qualification or for the learning outcomes achieved.

The Namibia Training Authority (NTA), a statutory body established through an Act of Parliament to regulate the provision of vocational education and training (VET) in the country, is one body that has developed unit standards for qualifications in the vocational education sector. In developing unit standards, the NTA engages the relevant industries to determine the competencies required. Once the unit standards for a particular qualification have been approved by the NQA, the NTA engages in the process of developing a curriculum,

implementation guide, training manual and assessment criteria, which are made available as a package to the training provider. Training providers also act as assessment centres.

Recognition practices

Since independence, Namibia has made positive strides in expanding access to its education system. Access has been widened through various educational programmes. However, the study opportunities for historically disadvantaged adults and youth are limited because of the lack of relevant qualifications that would facilitate entry to institutions of learning. Many Namibians were denied opportunities to engage in formal education because of their involvement in the liberation struggle. These people acquired skills and knowledge over the years but many are excluded from participating in the development of the country because their abilities are not formally recognised. In some cases there is no documented proof of their skills, in the form of a certificate. RPL is therefore intended to redress injustices of the past by recognising and accrediting relevant prior learning and experience. RPL can play an integral role within the Namibian education and training sector, since one of the key features of the NQF is the provision of opportunities for Namibians to gain qualifications by recognising competencies regardless of where they were learned.

Until very recently, there was no national policy on prior learning despite the imbalances in the education provision inherited from the colonial period. Finally, in 2009, the NQA and NTA were assigned the responsibility of overseeing the development of a national policy on the recognition of prior learning. An RPL steering committee with representatives from the different sectors was constituted to work on the draft policy. Following a consultative process, principled approval was granted by the Minister of Education. Full implementation will commence once the policy has been ratified. Registered providers in the education and training sector will then be required to develop institution-specific policies aligned to the national policy. This policy will enable candidates to earn credit for unit standards or full qualifications that are in line with the NQF. According to the policy, a single definition of RPL is not possible since it refers to a broad spectrum of processes all aimed at achieving a particular outcome; including recognition of prior certification, recognition of non-certificated formal learning, recognition of non-certified non-formal learning, articulation, credit transfer and mutual recognition (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2009a). Through this system the emphasis is placed on the abilities of the learner rather than the ability of the teacher.

It is worth noting the fact that the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) has developed an institutional policy on RPL to broaden access to its post-secondary programme. The policy defines RPL as "the process of identifying, matching, assessing and crediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning" (NAMCOL, 2008).

Applicants for RPL enter into an assessment agreement with the college before undergoing a series of assessments that assist them in displaying their competence. The assessment process involves pre- and post-interviews, portfolio development and proficiency tests. At the end of the assessment process candidates are given written feedback on the outcome of the assessment. At present, the policy is being applied to enable candidates to gain access into the college's post-secondary programmes at certificate and diploma levels.

Challenges facing the Namibian learning system

The perception that learning attained through conventional formal systems is superior to that attained through open and distance learning (ODL) settings, workplace experience and general life experience remains a key challenge. The implementation of the national RPL policy will be a useful tool in recognising knowledge, skills and experiences gained through various forms of learning (formal, informal and non-formal means). This is an issue of perception, since those in charge of implementing this policy are products of the conventional system. It will therefore take many years before this policy is effectively implemented.

Secondly, the slow pace in getting qualifications from training bodies registered in the framework hampers the full implementation of the NQF by the NQA. Learners are, therefore, not moving freely between the different systems or moving vertically on the qualification ladder as a result of recognition of prior learning or credit obtained through other service providers. This is also due to statutory provisions in the founding acts of publicly funded educational institutions, which empower them to award their own qualifications. The directive from the NQA to have all qualifications registered in the framework by 2015 would ultimately lead to an effective education system for Namibia.

Finally, according to Daniel and Ferreira (2009) publicly funded institutions are duplicating efforts in the education provision. This state of affairs is not sustainable. In view of the limited resources available to the education sector, there is a need to strengthen synergies between different sectors, rather than competing for the limited human and material resources. Synergy between the different education sectors is important in order to develop an integrated and comprehensive system that promotes lifelong learning. Despite this challenge, Namibia has successfully developed equivalency systems at secondary school level, which allow learners to flexibly transfer between conventional schools and ODL providers.

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Contextual and institutional arrangements for lifelong learning

Joseph Samuels [2]

Introduction

The South African Qualifications (SAQA) Act was passed in 1995 and provides the context wherein South African education and training takes place in the post-Apartheid era. South Africa has a population of nearly 50 million, of which more than 41 per cent live in poorer rural areas, and close to 54 per cent are 24 years or younger.

South Africa is experiencing rapid urban migration, especially among men in the 20–34 age group. As a result, a high proportion of households in rural areas are headed by young women. The legacy of Apartheid remains a significant challenge in South Africa, with various formal and informal initiatives underway to improve the level of education of black people. Approximately 4 per cent of the South African population are citizens of other countries, mostly from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Qualifications obtained outside South Africa are evaluated by SAQA, with the majority of applications falling into the highly skilled grouping. Most of these highly skilled migrants originated from Zimbabwe (42 per cent in 2010).

South Africa has in recent years achieved a high level of macro-economic and political stability. Though levels of inequality remain high (Gini coefficient = 0.35), they are no longer solely based on racial divisions. High levels of unemployment exist, particularly in the under-30 age group (49 per cent in 2002), and unemployment is higher among women than men. There has been a reduction in crafts and related trades, and most black employees remain in elementary occupations.

The level of education is generally high. Fewer than 9 per cent of adults between the ages of 15 and 64 are illiterate. By 2002 there were more than 33,000 established public institutions and registered independent institutions in South Africa catering for more than 13.5 million learners. In 2010 the overall pass rate for the Senior Certificate (matric) was 67.8 per cent, of whom 23.5 per cent passed with an endorsement to enter higher education. Gross primary school enrolment in South Africa was 101.71% in 2009[3]. In 2000 one million learners were participating in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, while more than 500,000 adult learners were in the adult basic education and training (ABET) system.

The national qualifications framework (NQF) was established in 1996, consisting of eight levels. The functions of standard-setting were centralised within the South African Qualifications Authority, while quality assurance was decentralised amongst 33 education and training quality assurance bodies. All nationally recognised qualifications are recorded in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), and include both unit standards-based qualifications and non-unit standards-based qualifications. After a lengthy review process the

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[2] with input from SAQA's research directorate

[3] http://data.worldbank.org/country/south-africa. Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown.

new NQF Act was passed in 2008 and came into effect from 1 June 2009. Implementation of the new act is still underway and the transitional process will take a few years to achieve. For example, one of the new quality councils was only launched on the 23 February 2010 and started operating legally from 1 April 2010.

In addition to changes in the NQF legislation the government also reformed the political and administrative structures of the education and training landscape. A single Ministry of Education was divided into two; a Ministry of Higher Education and Training (MHET), and a Ministry of Basic Education (MBE). The training component was removed from the Ministry of Labour and given to the Ministry of Higher Education and Training. This means that the MHET is responsible for universities, universities of technology, training colleges (e.g., nursing, agricultural, etc), colleges of further education and training, adult basic education and the entire training sector. The MBE is responsible for the entire formal schooling sector from primary to secondary school, as well as for the national adult literacy campaign, known as Kha Ri Gude.

The new South African NQF comprises three sub-frameworks and ten levels. Three types of qualifications are recognised: certificates, diplomas and degrees. Three Quality Councils are responsible for the sub-frameworks of higher education, further and general education, and trade and occupations. Each Quality Council is responsible for determining their qualification types in accordance with the overall criteria determined by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). SAQA is responsible for the overall development and implementation of the NQF and the coordination of the three Quality Councils. The three Quality Councils and SAQA report to the Ministry of Higher Education and Training.

The national qualifications framework includes the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Level 1 of the NQF incorporates the four sub-levels of adult basic education. All learners in the national adult literacy programme and in the four ABET sub-levels are recorded on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). Qualifications, unit standards, modules and short courses also can be registered on the NQF. Qualifications and unit standards have been defined as learning outcomes and assessment criteria. One credit is equal to ten notional hours of learning. If non-formal and informal education leads to registered standards in the NQF and providers are accredited, then the learning can be formally recognised. Our RPL policy also allows candidates to achieve qualifications in part or in full through the recognition of prior learning.

The South African NQF is comprehensive: it includes all sectors of the education and training system (i.e., higher education, general and further education and training, trades and occupations). The key issue is that these qualifications and standards must be registered in the national qualifications framework, which, with the latest reforms, also includes units and modules. If the outcomes of informal and non-formal learning are registered in this way they are recognised.

SAQA entered into a research partnership with the University of the Western Cape to research why recognition of prior learning (RPL) has failed to take off as envisaged. The research is being conducted at a variety of different sites. SAQA has also proposed national RPL strategy to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, to establish a national working

group that will assist in the further development of the national strategy, including the establishment of a network of RPL practitioners.

Institutional arrangements
According to the OECD report on South African RPL (OECD, 2007), four phases in the transformation of the South African education and training system can be identified:
1. 1990–1994: structural stasis and cultural malaise;
2. 1994–1996: manifestation of policy and emergence of new structures;
3. 1997–1999: general reappraisal of policy;
4. 2000 onwards: focus on implementation.

A national skills levy fund was established in 1998. By 2010 more than 182,000 learnerships had been awarded and over 7,067,688 certificates awarded for skills development activities. Despite various successes, the labour market remains largely concerned with the schooling curriculum and higher education; this is currently being addressed through various initiatives, such as the establishment of a qualifications framework for the occupational sector by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations.

SAQA was established in 1996 and has overseen the development and implementation of the NQF since 1997. This has included overseeing the establishment of 12 national standards bodies and more than one hundred standards generating bodies (SGBs), as well as the accreditation of 31 ETQAs. These structures have been reviewed and the new NQF Act has changed the structures as outlined above under the heading of contextual factors. Key players in non-formal and informal learning include the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, Ministry of Basic Education, the South African Qualifications Authority, the Council on Higher Education, the council on standards for general and further education and training (Umalusi), the Quality Council on Trades and Occupations, SETAs, professional bodies and councils, and the National Skills Authority.

Extensive legislation has been passed, driven largely by the transformational agenda still dominant in the country. Examples include the Higher Education Act (1997), SAQA Act (1995), Skills Development Act (RSA 1998c) and FET Act (RSA 1998d), as well as various amendments to the above-mentioned acts. Two current statutory regulations are inhibiting the development and implementation of RPL: matriculation with endorsement as an entry requirement into higher education; and the 50 per cent residency clause.

At present there is no formal systemic funding for RPL in South Africa. In terms of costing, the national policy guideline is that RPL services should not cost more than a full-time face-to-face programme. A limited number of assessment centres focusing on RPL have been established based on local needs, in contrast to the priority given to RPL in national policy.

Lifelong learning
There are, at present, legal and institutional initiatives, as well as ad hoc bottom up approaches, but no overarching framework for lifelong learning. There are clear legislation and policies in place that put the redress of unfair past practices high on the national agenda. One of the

key objectives of the South African NQF is specifically related to redress and the new NQF Act has retained this focus.

All of the education and training sectors are co-operating to implement policies in general, though there are areas where much improvement is needed, for example in the further education and training (FET) college sector as well as the higher education sector, where specific barriers still exist. The recognition of non-formal and informal learning is practised as a right and in many instances recognition is used to motivate adults. However, one of the key criticisms of the current situation is that, although legislation and policies are in place and there are a number of very good practices, implementation on a wide-enough scale has been disappointing.

Research and development resources have been earmarked. For example, the SAQA has recently entered into a partnership with a consortium of providers led by the University of the Western Cape. However, so far this partnership also suffers from the problem of insufficient resources.

Recognition practices

Technical arrangements for RPL are highlighted in the OECD (2007) report for South Africa. In South Africa the term RPL is used for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and is defined as a comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that learning which meets the requirements. Learning is measured in terms of specific learning outcomes for a specific qualification and may lead to achievement of credits towards the qualification. Two types of RPL have emerged in South Africa: RPL for credit, usually associated with general and further education and training, and RPL for access, usually associated with higher education.

Different approaches to RPL have also emerged. These include:

1. Credit-exchange: the ability of the individual to perform certain job tasks to a predetermined standard;
2. Developmental: the emphasis is on what the learner has learned. Rather than matching competence with pre-agreed standards, the curriculum and institutional prescriptions are used to determine 'acceptable' prior learning;
3. Radical: the collective rather than the individual becomes the focus. Only the experience of the emancipated group counts as knowledge; and
4. Trojan horse: an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula in ways in which both experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge are more closely harmonised.

In the South African context, RPL supports the transformation of education and training and is underpinned by a holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment that is both developmental and incremental. RPL is implemented in a variety of contexts, ranging from further education and training (FET), general education and training (GET) and higher education, to adult basic education and training (ABET) and workplace-based training.

There are three main target groups for RPL:

1. The access group: under-qualified adult learners wishing to upskill and improve their qualifications, and candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme;

2. The redress group: workers who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed, who may have worked for many years but were prevented from gaining qualifications due to restrictive past policies;

3. Candidates who leave formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short programmes. The greatest number of RPL candidates fall between NQF levels 2 and 4, and do not, in the main, possess a school-leaving certificate.

Prior learning is often unstructured, tacit and intuitive, requiring the assessor to determine whether formal or informal experience has met a competence level or is worthy of credit. Judgements have to be made if learning standards are met and the competence level is achieved.

The South African NQF is, in its current form, not a credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system; although it could be developed in this direction, as it is a credit-based system.

Aspects that may have a limiting effect on the portability of qualifications include entrenched institutional practices, the drive for profit and the 50 per cent residency clause. Recent developments that support credit accumulation and transfer include the registration of generic qualifications in the NQF, the inclusion of professional qualifications in the NQF, recognition of professional bodies, and the registration of professional designations.

The quality of assessment within the NQF relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. There is no fundamental difference between the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through a current learning programme; the only difference lies in the route to the assessment. The purpose of RPL is to identify what the candidate knows and can do, matching the candidate's skills and knowledge to specific standards, assessing the candidate against those standards, and crediting the candidate.

The form, quality and sources of evidence that will lead to the attainment of credits depend on the particular qualification; care should be taken neither to require too much evidence nor to expect the candidate to completely cover the syllabus.

Candidate support should not be underestimated, and should as far as possible include the possibility for candidates to choose the assessment methodologies they are most comfortable with. The 'nested' approach to standards generation and qualifications specification is a useful way to understand what should be assessed in an RPL process. A generic RPL process could include the following: a preparatory phase, an assessment phase, and if need be, an appeals process. The recognition practices are largely summative, linked to the qualifications and standards registered in the national qualifications framework. It also permits access to institutions (bridging programmes, undergraduate as well as graduate programmes), as well as upgrading practices in workplaces (e.g., the real estate, construction and insurance industries).

The role of social partners in the learning process and the process of RVA
Employers and trade unions play an important role in South Africa as active participants in the national qualifications framework and as sectoral education and training authorities. Direct input is made regarding legislation, policies and practices of RVA. Employers have also recently provided some funding for the RVA process, particularly with regard to RPL for their workers. The government is responsible for creating the legislative and policy environment and also provides funding.

Stakeholder behaviour
On the question of stakeholder behaviour with respect to RPL, the OECD (2007) report states that data on people who have completed RPL is not readily available, mainly due to difficulties experienced during uploads to the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). This problem has now largely been addressed. Information on people who have completed RPL is in the process of being tracked on the NLRD; by 2009, 6439 qualifications achievements and 45,637 unit standards were awarded via the RPL route to RPL learners.

While a number of RPL pilot projects have been undertaken since 2002, when the SAQA RPL Policy was developed, these were only partially successful, with concerns related to lack of information on RPL tools and procedures, inappropriate assessment tools, lack of opportunity to prepare, and general lack of understanding from the candidates noted.

Non-formal education
The emphasis in non-formal education and training and informal learning is on employability, given the skills shortage, and given the history of discrimination. RPL has been largely focused on workplaces, public and private education and training institutions.

Impact, effects, benefits and challenges
Between 1995 and 2004 the total number of qualifications awarded increased, with an average annual growth rate of 4.3 per cent. The highest growth was in four-year first degrees, honours degrees and Master's degrees. Some changes in admission policies at higher education institutions have also taken place, but these have been limited by staff and resource shortages. While all education and training quality assurance bodies (ETQAs) have developed recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies in order to comply with SAQA requirements, implementation plans and projects have been developed in only a few sectors. However, ETQAs have been able to make significant progress over the last number of years and have already uploaded 2.7 million learners records between 2006 and 2010.

The impact could potentially be very great, particularly where a history of discrimination, employability and skills shortage are critical factors. SAQA believes that the implementation of RPL should be expanded and driven through a national co-ordinated strategy and should receive proper funding in order to have a major impact. The Minister of Higher Education and Training has been asked to establish a national RPL task team to develop such a national RPL strategy.

Society in South Africa is profoundly unequal. This has historical causes, but the current economic environment also seems to increase social inequality. The formal education system is struggling particularly to provide quality education and training to all citizens. Unemployment is between 30 and 40 per cent. Learning and education have a great role to play in increasing employability, reskilling, etc. There are serious recognition, validation and accreditation issues: although legislation and policies are in place, and there are areas of good practice, the key challenge is to implement the RPL on a large scale. For this, a national co-ordinated strategy with the appropriate resources is necessary. The strategy should address the following issues:

- Fill gaps in the statutory framework through the development of appropriate policy;
- Create viable funding mechanisms;
- Develop a national RPL association as a mechanism for enhancing and measuring progress;
- Develop a wider range of credible RPL assessment methods and instruments;
- Encourage and facilitate the formation of partnerships for delivery;
- Coordinate the approach to specific challenges in higher education, further education and training, industry, and organised labour;
- Coordinate a national RPL information and advocacy campaign;
- Coordinate RPL-related research (needs analyses, cost-benefit analyses, tracking of progress, models of best practice) and integrate findings into RPL processes;
- Support nodes of advisory services across the country.

The OECD (2007) report on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning concludes by highlighting two main purposes of RPL in South Africa: access and redress.

RPL should be an integrated feature of assessment policies of ETQAs and their constituent providers. The key challenge for the implementation of RPL in South Africa is sustainability. RPL, on its own, is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment in South Africa, but is a key developmental strategy that should be further prioritised in the South African context (ibid).

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THE ARAB REGION

Non-formal education pathways

Jawad Al-Gousous

Introduction

Jordan has a total population of 6,093,000 (World Bank, 2011), of which, in 2008, 57.3 per cent were of working age (15–64 years). The school enrolment rate in 2010 was 92 per cent (World Bank, 2011). The literacy rate of people aged 15+ in 2007 was 92 per cent. The unemployment rate of the total labour force in 2009 was 12.9 per cent (World Bank, 2011).

The national qualifications framework

The initial work on the NQF took place in 2006 through collaboration between an ETF-facilitated technical team and representatives of the Ministry of Education (MoE), Balqa Applied University (BAU) representing community colleges, the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), employers' and employees' associations, and other donor projects (Siyaha and Sabeq projects).

The national qualifications framework in Jordan is still in the design phase. A draft qualifications framework with broad descriptors (knowledge, skills and competence) was developed in 2008. The draft framework proposed seven levels of qualifications (ETF, 2010). The NQF is an important part of the government employment and TVET (E-TVET) strategy (ETF, 2010), developed by the E-TVET Council in 2008. The strategy includes the establishment of a quality assurance (QA) system comprising an NQF, occupational classifications, licensing, certification, programme development, curriculum and training facility standards, and accreditation, equity and lifelong learning. The NQF will provide programmes leading to sequenced articulated certification levels. It will give social partners a key role in organising a sectoral approach to identifying skill training needs. The E-TVET council will provide direction, mechanisms and systems that contribute to the development of a NQF.

In 2009, the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) was established. One of its key priorities was to develop and implement the quality assurance and accreditation of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and programmes in Jordan. Another priority was the implementation of sectoral initiatives, mainly in the tourism and water sectors. Using the European Training Foundation (ETF) model, committees were set up (ETF, 2010) to revise occupations and occupational profiles.

Lifelong learning

One of the main purposes of the NQF is to remove impediments for entry to further education, thus promoting equity and lifelong learning. The direction for educational change in Jordan is derived from the Vision Forum for the Future of Education in Jordan, which was held in September 2002. This event generated an important series of targets for educational change covering all areas of education and training: from early childhood to higher education and advanced vocational and professional training (Ministry of Education, 2004).

The four broad national initiatives developed are: lifelong learning; responsiveness to the economy; access to information and communications technology; and quality learning. All four exert enormous impact upon any reform for basic and secondary education.

The educational system in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is based on aspirations to freedom, justice, and human and economic development. The philosophy of education in Jordan stems from the Jordanian Constitution, the Arab-Islamic civilisation, and the Jordanian national experience (ETF, 2001).

Recognition practices

At the moment, Jordan has no system for the recognition of skills and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Article 11 of the by-law to the E-TVET Council law No. 46 (2008) determines the tasks and duties of the CAQA, which are to conduct occupational tests for those involved in technical and vocational work and to grant occupational licences. This provides new opportunities for the validation of skills acquired on the job or different forms of non-formal and informal learning (ETF, 2011).

In addition, non-formal education and training courses are an important pathway for returning to formal education.

Non-formal education pathways

Non-formal education and training activities provide learners with new opportunities to find jobs in ways that are similar to the formal education system. This type of education directly links learning with practical and productive work and must be considered an indispensable part of the social, economic and human resources programmes in Jordan.

During an expert group meeting on non-formal education policy in Jordan, Mutaman (2006) stated that the general and special objectives of non-formal education are similar to the philosophy and objectives of formal education in Jordan. The National Report on Adult Education in Jordan (2009) specifies the overarching aims of non-formal education: decreasing illiteracy rate by 0.5–1 per cent per annum, to reach 5 per cent by 2015; providing universal education by opening evening centres and expanding home studies; raising the educational and cultural levels of students by opening summer centres in government schools; producing a trained labour force responsive to the market needs in and outside Jordan, and developing legislation in line with the formal education development objectives. The Ministry of Education implemented vocational training courses to empower students with skills to find jobs and improve their socioeconomic status. Education that links learning with productive work is considered an indispensable part of social, economic and human resources programmes.

Non-formal education is divided into two paths in terms of outputs: academic and vocational. The academic path supervised by the Ministry of Education provides opportunities for citizens who have been deprived of schooling at school age. An integrated programme, set up by the ministry, extends from the first to the 12th grade. It consists of: illiteracy elimination (grades 1–6) and post-illiteracy programmes, such as evening classes and home schooling.

The non-formal education programme was officially integrated into the NFE division of the Ministry of Education, which in turn has served as the official regulating body for non-formal education programmes since 2007. Questscope is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) that provides non-formal education to out-of-school children and youth in Jordan, in partnership with the Ministry of Education. The relationship and management structure between Questscope and Ministry of Education became operative in 2003 (Questscope, 2010).

The literacy programme

The Jordanian Government's literacy programme for adults comprises all types of education and training. It is based on the same philosophy as formal education and is supported by the Jordanian Constitution and the Act of Education. The programme includes the provision of free study materials and other incentives. Two approaches are highlighted: the preventive and the remedial. The preventive approach ensures the provision of basic education to all of school age. The Ministry of Education enacted compulsory education for the first six years in 1952, which was extended to nine years in 1964. In 1988, compulsory education was extended to cover the first ten grades. The net enrolment ratio in basic education reached 96.5 per cent in 2004/2005 (Mutaman, 2006).

The curriculum for levels 1 and 2 of the literacy programme include the following subjects: Islamic education, Arabic language, arithmetic, cultural studies (level 1), introduction to English language (level 2), and introduction to computer use (level 2) (Yousif, 2008a). The aim of vocational training courses is to provide students with the basic information and technical skills that are needed in daily life, in addition to strengthening continuous interaction between the training centre and the surrounding community.

Post-literacy programme

Jordan's educational system has always been keen to provide further learning opportunities to all learners who have already gained basic literacy skills (the 3Rs). The educational system incorporates the recommendations of the International Arab conferences. Relevant academic and vocational programmes have been designed to suit the learner's needs, interests and capabilities. The academic stream includes follow-up academic programmes and evening studies programmes. The academic programmes last for two years, at the end of which learners receive certificates equivalent to the sixth-grade certificate. Evening studies cover the seventh to the 12th grade, and allow students free choice of subjects and the opportunity to take an exam in case they opt to pursue further education. In this case, the learner is obliged to follow the rules and regulations of formal education. The evening studies programme lasts two semesters. This programme is funded by learners' fees.

Home schooling programme

Another non-formal education pathway is the home schooling programme (HSP), which aims to enhance lifelong learning and self-learning for those who leave formal education.

The 'educating drop-outs programme' is linked to home schooling with options for secondary schooling. Learners in this programme are allowed to take the secondary school exam. This programme, which was designed to educate school drop-outs, has the key objective of involving marginalised children and youth in educational and vocational programmes using participatory rapid assessment (PRA) methodology. Specifically, it encourages children and youth to participate in the design of the materials they read, and developing training modules for teachers that also incorporate the viewpoints of the learners themselves. Other key objectives include helping schools to create a suitable learning environment for this target group, building the capacity of the teachers who will deal with this group, and enhancing the participatory method in the teaching process (Questscope, 2010).

Vocational Training Corporation (VTC)
Students with technical vocational aspirations can train with the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a government institution. Learners who graduate with NFE certificates can enrol in the VTC just like students with tenth-grade certificates from formal educational system schools. Although explicitly admitted into the VTC as NFE students, upon graduation they receive exactly the same certificate as students who previously attended formal schools. At that point, NFE students have been reintegrated with their peers in terms of formally verified qualifications.

The National Development Employment Fund (DEF) has formally agreed with Questscope to create mechanisms to provide small-business loans to students who successfully complete the VTC entrepreneurship course with aspirations to start a small business. By graduating from the VTC and obtaining a loan from the DEF, many disadvantaged youths have successfully been mainstreamed, finally erasing the at-risk stigma. The availability of these loans ensures that previously marginalised children are given chances from which they were once formally deprived (Questscope, 2010).

Impacts, benefits and challenges of recognising non-formal learning
Once learners have the opportunity to explore their strengths and talents more thoroughly through the NFE programme, some discover that they would like to pursue opportunities other than vocational and technical training. Students can therefore utilise NFE as a way to get back to the formal stream by taking placement tests for grades 7–9 in the home schooling stream. This step has been taken and approved by the Ministry of Education and Prime Ministry in response to Questscope efforts, as part of the memorandum of understanding with the MOE. (Jordanian Official Gazette, 31 March 2011).

Non-formal education programmes and training courses for early school-leavers (under 18 years and youth between 18 and 26) need to be recognised as they are an indispensable part of education. Procedures that guarantee integration of formal and non-formal programmes should be implemented. Open channels and bridges between non-formal and formal education have to be promoted. It is a challenge to encourage governmental and non-governmental organisations to take up responsibilities in non-formal education. Limited financial resources have to be allocated and increased. Governments should be the key

duty-bearers of adults' right to quality non-formal education. Quality is not only an issue in formal education and training, but more so in adult learning. The education authorities should support the work of NGOs and international organizations in regard to transferability, accreditation and certification. Capacity building of recognition personnel is a key challenge in assessing learning outcomes in relation to qualifications and curricular frameworks.

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Adult education and recognition practices

Abed Al Fattah Al Obeyd

Introduction
The National Report on Development of Education in the Arab Republic of Syria emphasises the importance of an education system that caters to greater productivity, meets the requirements of the labour market, generates job opportunities, and provides skills of international standards (Ministry of Education, 2008). The current plan of the Ministry of Education of Syria stresses the importance of balancing teaching and learning processes.

Lifelong learning
The Syrian Government is aware that education is crucial in achieving human rights, reducing poverty and helping people enter the labour market. In order to promote individual, social and economic growth, the Syrian Government encourages lifelong learning.

The Syrian government considers education as a fundamental base for economic and social development, and therefore supports all types of learning – formal, non-formal and informal – as critical for the development of a sustainable society. In Syria, formal education takes place in official schools and is performed by educated and qualified teachers. Formal education includes students between the ages of 6 and 18. Basic education, which is obligatory and completely free, is for students aged between 6 and 15. Beyond the basic level, students pay a small fee for their education.

The non-formal education programme is an alternative pathway in Syria and is implemented by governmental and non-governmental organisations. The target group of this programme is early school-leavers.

The adult education system
The national report on the state of adult education in the Syrian Republic emphasises that adult education should involve more than the achievement of basic literacy, and should enhance each individual's opportunity to participate in social and economic growth.

The Syrian Ministries of Education and of Culture redefined adult education in the early 1990s. As a result, "A new strategy was developed to include a component of vocational education within the literacy and basic education curriculum for adults, both male and female, as well as a component of science and technology" (UNESCO, 2003, p. 32).

Vocational training
The Syrian government has established two types of vocational institutes. The first is the formal vocational education institute, the second the vocational training institute. In the latter, students are trained for different occupations. After completing training they receive certificates that help them to enter the labour market or work for the government. Non-governmental organisations operate a third type of training institute. Employers and factory owners, as well as labour and trade unions, play a major role in improving and promoting vocational education through the training of their employees. These training courses improve

workers' skills and make them eligible for promotion. At the end of such training the students receive certificates.

Centres for social education
Centres for social education play an important role in the education of adults. Some of the first such centres were opened in collaboration with UNESCO and certain supporting countries, such as Japan. These centres are distributed in poor quarters, rural areas and areas inhabited by Iraqi refugees. They offer computer training at different levels, as well as lessons in practical skills, such as sewing, and are supervised by the Directorate of Adult Education under the Ministry of Culture. It is possible to gain education while working in social education centres. Six- to nine-month employment-related courses can be taken, such as learning crafts. In many ways the situation in Syria is very similar to that in other Arab countries, especially in rural areas where "social, cultural, religious and economic factors combine to create barriers, placing girls and women at a serious disadvantage" (Yousif 2009, p. 22). The adult education sector provides several options for improving the situation of adults. However, many families still prevent their adult girls from attending classes.

There are numerous obstacles to adult education and training in Syria; most importantly, the shortage of professionally trained personnel. As in many Arab states, adult education is not yet recognised as a profession with a visible and attractive career structure. The administrative, organisational and teaching personnel involved in adult education will have to increase considerably if adult education services (including adult literacy) are to be expanded (Yousif, 2009). Yousif (2008a) points out in the Research Paper for the UNESCO Regional Conference in Support of Global Literacy that, so far, literacy teaching has been implemented by three categories of teachers: full-time teachers, part-time teachers, and volunteers.

In general, adult and literacy programmes have to deal with a very fragile infrastructure on top of a weak structure of formal primary education (Yousif, 2009).

Literacy and basic skills
Primary education certificates are given only to those who complete the formal education system. In order to complete literacy courses nine months of schooling must be attended. At the end of these nine months the learner must pass an exam. The primary school certificate is equivalent to the third grade. If the student is younger than 18 he or she can return to the formal education system (secondary school), or can take the secondary school exam one year after receiving the primary school certificate. After that, studies at university through all possible means (free governmental university, open learning, virtual learning etc.) can be completed.

Syria recognises the need to make adult literacy a priority, especially for people aged between 15 and 45. The law obliges all government institutions, trade unions and voluntary organisations to contribute to literacy work. The 5-year development plan, implemented in 2006, includes information about the development of human resources, especially for women. The Ministry of Culture has the responsibility for improving adult literacy. The Directorate of Adult Education under the Ministry of Culture has also built partnerships

with a number of ministries, trade unions and NGOs. There is now a National Council for Literacy, chaired by the Prime Minister (Yousif, 2008b). A home learning project, in which a skilled worker, student or other educated family members teaches illiterate members of their family, has been developed and has achieved great success. Another approach used is to send a teacher to a house to help the student in adapting the curriculum to his/her needs and observing the student until an exam is passed. Syria also has a special project for girls' education in collaboration with UNICEF, and has established boarding schools for Bedouin children (Yousif, 2009, p. 10).

The Ministry of Education plays an active role in the field of literacy, supporting teachers and school buildings, issuing the required instructions to all schools, conducting open literacy classes, available to students who leave formal education early. The Ministry of Education has responsibility for the following programmes: 1) a formal basic education programme (Group A) teaches reading skills to students aged 6–18; 2) a non-formal basic education programme (Group B) offers services to students aged 10–14, as well those who leave formal education early or do not enter it at all. The non-formal education curricula are individualised, shortened and abridged to make up for the lost years of study. After receiving the primary education certificate, these learners can submit the results of the basic education certificate (equivalent to third grade). If they are younger than 18 and pass the exams, they can return to the formal education system (secondary schools). Once students receive a basic education certificate, they are also eligible to take the secondary school exam after one year and complete their studies at a university.

Post-literacy
Currently more attention is being given to curricula in the post-literacy stage (Yousif, 2009). The most important current literacy projects for adults are those dealing with the school curriculum, professional and technical education, enhancing teacher qualification, and the Space Channel project. Since 2004 the Ministry of Education (2004) has included information, technology and communications in the following fields of education: enriching educational processes by redesigning lessons; using computer resources such as documentary films; using aids in data analysis and acquisition of new knowledge, as well as self-education.

Recognition practices
The Syrian Government has succeeded in building bridges between formal and non-formal education. This happens when early school-leavers are trained in non-formal education programmes and afterwards rejoin the formal education system (once the required tests and exams have been passed). Only the government can recognise and accredit non-formal education and issue certificates permitting continuous study at universities. The government is also the only funding resource of the formal and non-formal education system.

Recognition and accreditation of non-formal education are processes whereby adults can return to school and join formal learners in their own age cohort. Adult learners gain certificates after submitting and passing the required exams. These certificates are issued by occupational training institutes and are recognised as well as accepted by the government.

There is no difference between certificates issued through formal or non-formal education, or those enabling learners to establish their own small-scale industrial and craft enterprises.

These systems provide people who have been disadvantaged by the existing education system with a new opportunity. Syria is witnessing a remarkable development in the fields of formal and non-formal education, which is supported by the government, civil society and the private sectors.

Benefits and impacts

Some of the benefits of the education projects are the linking of literacy with developing teaching capacities. Another positive effect is seen in regards to continuous education for adults, who are permitted to take exams and to rejoin mainstream education or join the labour market.

Challenges

The most notable difficulties facing adult education are: the lack of a cooperation plan between local society and government authorities; the lack of specific experience of adult education trainers (most of them are teachers in formal schools); and the lack of study and research related to adult education. The most important general challenges are the quality of teaching, school retention and the connection between education and the labour market. A further challenge is to design new ways of assessing non-formal learning outcomes, in combination with more traditional methods based on tests and examinations.

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ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

National Qualifications Framework assisting citizens excluded from education

Abdul Rahim Nasry

Introduction

Afghanistan's economy consists mostly of micro-enterprises in the informal sector and subsistence agriculture which have emerged from almost a quarter century of conflict. "The formal sector with its medium and large-scale industrial activity is almost non-existent" (NSDP, 2007:5). The literacy rate in Afghanistan is extremely low, and over 70 per cent of women have never attended school (NSDP, 2007).

Although rising rates of school attendance for both girls and boys augur well for a progressive regeneration of the economy, it is vital that the general education provision is complemented by a diverse, cost-effective, equitable and relevant VET (vocational education and training) system. The system currently envisaged aims to ensure that industry and commerce have access to a skilled pool of labour while simultaneously providing the men and women of Afghanistan with the knowledge and skills required to become gainfully employed in decent work. Ultimately, this system, in line with modern approaches to technical vocational education and training (TVET), will need to be managed and supervised by an overarching independent TVET board.

In Afghanistan the existing official qualifications system is for general education from grade 1 to 12, and for higher secondary education up to grade 14. Grades 1 to 14 fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, whereas the higher education levels are under the authority of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). There is currently no qualifications framework to recognise non-formal and informal learning (NSDP, 2007, p. 5).

Some institutional arrangements have been developed to improve and restructure Afghanistan's education and training sectors. These include the Afghanistan national qualifications authority, the Afghanistan national qualifications frameworks; and the Education Sector Strategy of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) (NSDP, 2008).

The national qualifications framework

Since May 2010, the Dutch Expertise Centre on Education (CINOP) has supported the Committee on Education and Skills Policy (CESP), and has been responsible for the development of the Afghanistan national qualification authority and national qualifications framework. CINOP focuses on learning in and outside the formal education system, and has expertise in the validation and recognition of qualifications obtained outside traditional education contact (i.e., accreditation of prior learning). The centre also provides solutions to improve the quality of education. The objectives of the CESP-CINOP project are:

1. to develop a draft act defining the structure, function and operational methodology for an ANQF;
2. to define the operational structures and outline the operational procedures for independent boards under the Afghanistan National Qualifications Authority;

3. to develop competencies and operational procedures for a comprehensive, levels-based NQF; and
4. to initiate the development of the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Board (NTVETB), and four other boards (primary education, Islamic education, secondary education and higher education) as independent entities under the Afghanistan National Qualifications Authority (ANQA).

The two-year project is part of the Afghanistan Skills Development Project (ASDP) and financed by the World Bank. The first CINOP-CESP seminar in August 2010 focused on legal and operational procedures and the structure of a national qualifications framework. The objective of the seminar was to reach a general consensus about the proposed ANQF.

The following factors are crucial in developing an NQF: the creation of a legislative basis; the need for all those engaged in education and training and in labour market policy to work together; communication with the public; and the need to take a considerable period of time to develop the framework.

The key benefits of establishing an NQF may be summarized as follows:
1. Helping individuals by recognising their qualifications at home and abroad;
2. Helping learners by providing confidence that the qualifications in the ANQF are quality assured;
3. Helping individuals to plan their education and training career progression;
4. Helping learners to make informed choices about their chosen qualifications;
5. Helping providers offer programmes (courses) that lead to recognised qualifications; and
6. Helping employers recruit employees from inside the country and abroad.

In the process of establishing the ANQF, an integrated levels framework based on the Irish model of NQF has been envisaged in order to embed formal, non-formal and informal training and education without privileging one sector over the other. The ANQF must assist citizens who were historically excluded from national education, training and skills development system so that they have the opportunity to reach their potential (CINOP, 2011, p. 11). The new model should be clear and unambiguous as far as the roles of the government, the respective statutory bodies responsible for advice or implementation, and other participants in the ANQF processes are concerned.

With regard to TVET, the current TVET provision is gradually emerging, after nearly 30 years of decline and inactivity during the years of conflict. Most dedicated TVET institutions were totally moribund in 2001. "Their human and physical infrastructure had almost totally collapsed, the majority of technical teachers had stagnated, the curriculum was totally outdated and the provision was almost totally ineffective as far as meeting the reconstruction demand for appropriately educated and trained workforce" (NSDP, 2011). The situation has changed significantly as of today, and a number of new TVET institutions have been built and are beginning to operate.

The proposed ANQF has eight levels and associated level descriptors (see Table 17.1). The focus is on the lower levels and TVET levels in the first stage, which take into account the scale of the illiterate population in Afghanistan, the lack of standardisation in VET, the urgency of increasing the number of skilled workers in the labour market, and the variety and diversity of TVET institutions.

ANQF levels	Literacy and basic education	Secondary and higher education	TVET	Islamic education
L8		H.E./Ph.D.		
L7		H.E./Master's degree		
L6		H.E./Bachelor's degree		
L5		Tertiary Education/Grade 14 diploma	Tertiary TVET/Grade 14 Diploma	Tertiary Islamic Education/Grade 14 Diploma
L4		Advanced Certificate High School/Grade 12	Advanced Certificate TVET High School	Advanced Certificate Islamic High School
L3	Intermediate Education/Grade 9 Certificate		Intermediate Vocational Education and Training Certificate	Intermediate Islamic Education/Grade 9 Certificate
L2	**School Preparation** Literacy LC **Progression** Literacy LB **Foundation** Literacy LA		Vocational training Certificate	
L1	Basic Level		Apprenticeship	

Table 9.1 The Afghanistan National Qualifications Framework (ANQF) chart. Source: CINOP, 2011, p. 11.

The most basic level recognises general cognitive and vocational skills learnt through apprenticeship (no literacy component). The second National Basic Certificate involves some vocational training, and targets basic level literacy, numeracy and practical life skills. The second National School preparation Certificate L2 concentrates on general and practical life skills. The National Skills Intermediate Certificates can be delivered as stand-alone programmes for basic education programme as grade 9 graduates of general education (CINOP, 2011, p. 13). Advanced certificates target level 4 or high school programme in general education, TVET and Islamic education. Level 5 includes general education and is the highest qualification in the vocational sector. Entry to university is possible through levels 6 (Bachelor degree), 7 (Master's degree), and 8 (Ph.D. degree) remain as in the mainstream system (CINOP, 2011, p. 14).

The existing national skills development programme (NSDP) framework can be accommodated easily with the Afghanistan national qualification framework. NSDP was announced in 2004 and is one of Afghanistan's national priority programmes. The main goals of the NSDP are to a) contribute to the socioeconomic recovery of Afghanistan through the provision of a TVET system that is responsive to labour market needs, and b) to provide Afghan women and men with the knowledge and skills for decent work. Eventually, the national system will be managed by a National Vocational Education and Training Authority (NVETA), operating through a number of regional offices. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) will be the lead ministry for the programme, which is scheduled to run over a period of 15 years (NSDP, 2009).

Lifelong learning

The existing legislation governing the education and training system in Afghanistan does not allow for any lifelong learning process based on non-formal and informal learning. A framework based on competence levels is expected to be developed, with an act of parliament to permit lifelong learning and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning practices as a right. The aim of this framework will be to motivate adults for lifelong learning. Afghanistan aims to have a holistic approach to lifelong learning (see Figure 9.2). Elements of this approach have already been conceptualised by the NSDP, according to which lifelong learning entails seven elements: knowledge; problem solving; technical skills; productive and reproductive skills; attitudes; ethics; and generic skills (essential skills).

Literacy as an important foundation for lifelong learning

According to Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals Report (2005), the estimated literacy rate of people aged 15 and above was 34 per cent (50 per cent for men and 18 per cent for women). The Education Minister approved LIFE (Literacy Initiative for Empowerment) in 2007 as the national framework for the MoE and all development partners to achieve the literacy goals set out in the National Strategic Plan (NESP 2006–2010). The LIFE framework connects literacy efforts to global initiatives (Education for All and UN Literacy Decade).

There are different literacy programmes provided, including Enhancement of Literacy (ELA), Learning for Community Empowerment Programme 2 (LCEP 2), and Literacy and Education in Afghanistan, Right Now! (LEARN). ELA is a literacy programme run in cooperation between the Afghan and Japanese governments and UNESCO within the framework of LIFE. The aim of ELA is to develop capacity and conduct policy advocacy for nationwide replication of the programme's good practices. The LECP 2 programme provides an 18-month community economic empowerment programme which integrates productive skills and business development training, literacy and numeracy education and savings and investment strategies for 312,000 learners in 20 provinces over a period of five years. The aim of LEARN is to enhance and improve the quality of literacy programmes by demonstrating an integrated approach that combines literacy, livelihood and life skills (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Afghanistan is innovative in providing literacy in the following ways: literacy in mosques, literacy in prisons, and literacy for soldiers. Due to the fact that mosques are a vital part of every community they are identified to utilise religious leaders, both in rural and

Figure 9.2 The holistic approach to skills development. Source: MoLSA, 2007.

urban communities, to work as literacy facilitators following training by the literacy department of the Ministry of Education. Religious leaders can play an important role in delivering literacy training and encouraging members of their communities (particularly women) to participate in literacy programmes. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and prison authorities conduct literacy classes in prisons. The stakeholders recognised that literacy provision in prisons can lead to crime reduction. Literacy classes for soldiers aim to raise awareness of the rule of law and human rights, which are the key to building a peaceful and secure country (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Recognition practices

In Afghanistan there is no system to validate outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. The terms recognition and validation are relatively new. Under the existing qualifications system, only non-formal and informal learning that is equivalent to grade six of formal school is recognised, and only on condition that the learner is of a suitable age for the level at which he/she is assessed. Another condition is that the learner continues his/her education in a formal school.

A large majority of Afghan people gain training and education from non-formal or NGO-run training centres. Skills are generally learned in an informal environment by working as apprentices with masters, fathers or brothers. However, this learning is not officially recognised or certified. In the coming years a system will be put in place for the recognition

and validation of non-formal and informal learning linked to the qualifications framework. Validation could be be made mandatory by linking it to a qualifications framework. According to CINOP (2011),

> "*The policy for strengthening ANQF implementation aims to make the ANQF more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the country. In particular, the ANQF must assist citizens who were historically excluded from the national education, training and skills development system so that they have the opportunity to reach their potential. The ANQF is therefore based on certain key principles of lifelong learning, such as: an integrated approach to education, training and skills development; the recognition and appreciation of distinctions between different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education and training*" (CINOP 2011, p. 8).

Various forms of learning are required in an integrated skills development system. However, outcomes and competences from non-formal and informal learning need to be to be properly assessed and receive recognition in accordance with proper policy and guidelines for quality assurance. A national credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system is expected to accord credit value to registered unit standards and other components of qualifications for access purposes or towards the award of a qualification (CINOP, 2011, p. 9). This will enhance the recognition of learning achievements and the progress of learners in the system.

Recognition processes
NSDP has proposed a methodology for the assessment of skills based on a competency-based training (CBT) approach as shown in Figure 9.2. The assessment includes identification of competencies, collection of evidence of performance and knowledge, and comparison of evidence to occupational standards. If competencies are sufficiently demonstrated, then a certificate is issued, if not, the learner is recommended to do further training.

Of course these are only policy intentions and there will be many challenges in their implementation. However, the reform process is very recent and may adopt a standard selection procedure based on recommendations and suggestions of the technical firms.

Non-formal education
Non-formal education and training is offered mainly by the Ministries of Education, Labour and Social Affairs, and by NGOs. The updating of standards with a focus on occupational skills standards is undertaken by these ministries.

Ensuring employability, career development, and personal development, regardless of whether people attain a qualification at the end, will be vital. The current situation in the vocational education and training sector is chaotic because many unregulated, unqualified and inexperienced organisations provide what is often an arbitrary range of vocational education and training activities that largely ignore the needs of the labour market, waste resources and lead to disillusionment of the trainees (MoLSA, 2007). Establishing a modern and well-structured VET system is the aim of the NSDP: "… the intention is to ensure that it is demand-driven, inclusive, cost-effective and competitive, and that credit for learning is awarded at all levels

and is standardised within a flexible qualifications framework – and delivered by an interconnected network of accredited, public and private training providers" (MoLSA, 2007, p. 8). In particular, access and entry barriers have to be reduced to the minimum possible. For those who require extra learning experience to gain access, additional bridging courses should be offered (MoLSA, 2007).
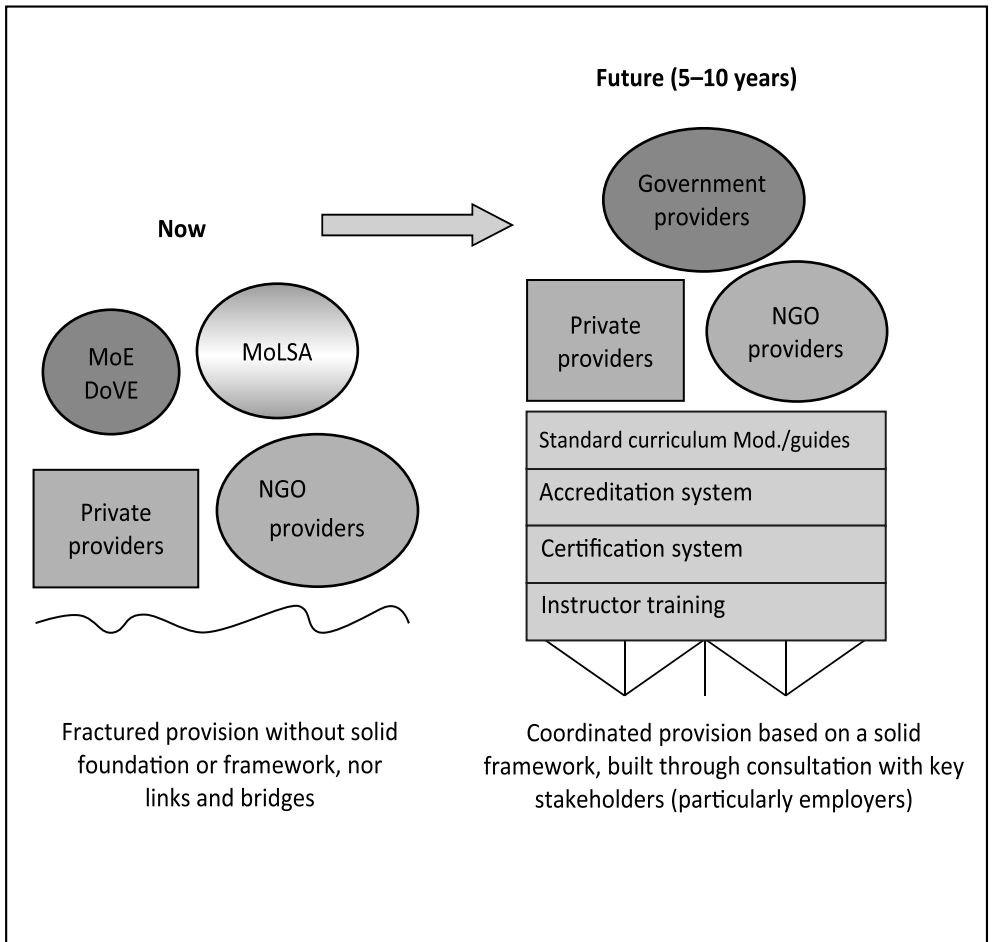

Figure 9.3 The coordinated VET system. Source: MoLSA, 2007, p. 10.

The TVET system envisages a coordinated framework rather than a fragmented and disconnected range of providers (see Figure 9.4). This coordinated approach will ensure that:

"over the short-to-medium term the more basic skills will be available through NGOs and private providers; basic and intermediate vocational training will be available through the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), NGOs and private providers; more advanced craft and technician vocational education and training will be available through the Ministry of Education (MoE), NGOs and private providers; and more advanced technological training will be available through the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), NGOs and private providers, then one might envisage a complete pathway through all of these levels, with each being coordinated and serviced by the NSDP and offering further studies or access to the labour market" (MoLSA, 2007, p.11).

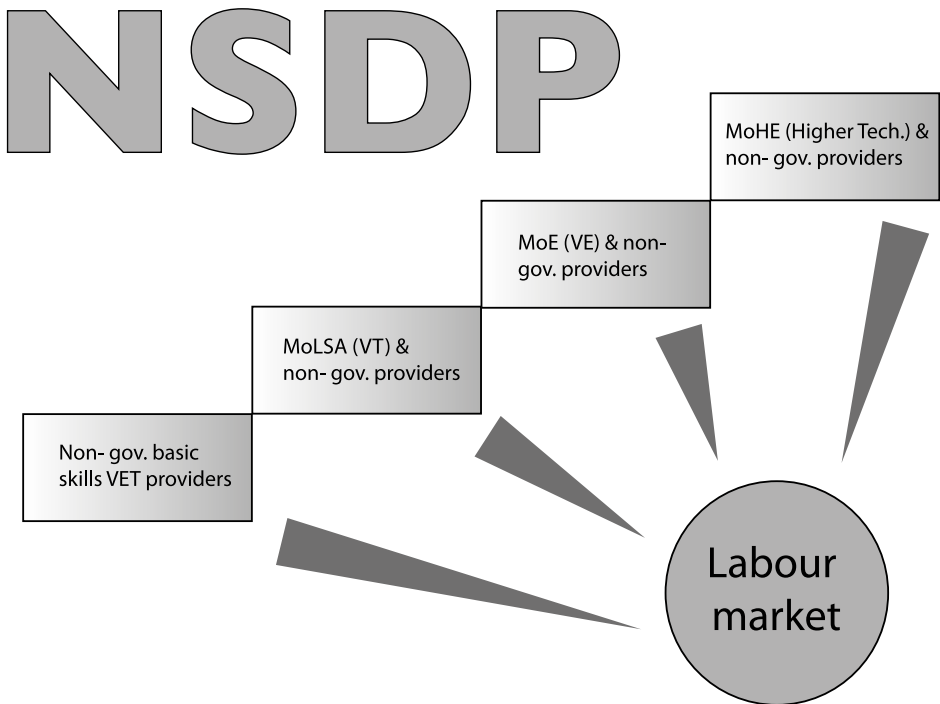The access and progression concept is shown in Figure 9.4.

Figure 9.4 Access and possible progression through the VET system. Source: MoLSA, 2007, p. 11.

Impacts and challenges

As the reform process is still in progress, little implementation has taken place, and no analysis of impact or recognition processes is yet available. The existing system is not responsive to the needs of the labour market; rather, it is rigid. There are no functioning quality assurance mechanisms such as ANQF or awarding bodies. Everything is done by the training providers themselves. The existing curricula are outdated and not responsive to the needs of learners and employers; there is a lack of trained and qualified teachers/instructors especially in the TVET sector. There are no mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning, so that if a person studies at a university and leaves before completing a degree, the education he/she attained at the university is not recognised.

Moreover, the quality of provision is very poor. The registrations of training providers are not well coordinated and there is no such standard system or criteria for registration and accreditation.

Reforms will need to take into account the training of competent teachers/trainers and to have quality management systems in place for the qualification framework. Additionally, reform needs to assume dedicated personnel for managing the system and organisation.

According to CINOP (2011), the success of recognition will depend on the following factors:

1. The ANQF must be comparable to the existing qualifications structure. To ensure wide general acceptance it should not be seen as too radical a departure from what exists today;
2. The underprivileged sections of the community must be catered for, particularly those that do not even possess the necessary basic literacy and numeracy. Bridge courses should help then to gain accesstothe lowest level of the qualifications framework;
3. A large percentage of the current semi-skilled and skilled workforce who have gained their skills and knowledge from on-the-job informal methods or semi-formal courses provided by the employer, must be given opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. They should be helped to demonstrate what they do and how well they do it through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process; and
4. The concept of progression should be catered for in the qualifications framework. This means that workers start at the first level of the framework, and then progress to the top in their respective areas of study through a combination of work experience and formal learning programmes. (CINOP, 2011, p. 10)

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Non-formal education programmes

Ugyen Tshomo

Introduction

Bhutan has a total population of 708,484. The literacy rate of people aged above 15 years in 2005 was 53 per cent (World Bank, 2011). Buddhism arrived in Bhutan in the eighth century and since then has played a vital role in shaping the social, political, economic and cultural evolution of the country. The only form of formal education available in Bhutan until the introduction of Western forms (in the 1950s) was monastic education. Western education has been promoted and expanded since 1961 to address basic educational needs and develop the human resources that are required for the socioeconomic development of the country. Even today, monastic education continues to be a crucial part of the national culture (Ministry of Education, 2004). Since the 1960s the education sector in Bhutan has been growing steadily.

National qualifications framework

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources are in the process of developing vocational qualifications framework for Bhutan (BVQF). The BVQF will be based on occupational skill standards and includes the International Labour Organization's recommendations as well as international best practices (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, 2010).

Even though Bhutan does not yet have a national qualifications framework, it has a national qualifications system. The education system of Bhutan comprises general education, monastic education, non-formal education, continuing education, vocational training and in-service skill development. In Bhutan there are two types of monastic schools; government-supported ones that come under the Je Khenpo (local district), and private monastic schools that are established and managed by other religious leaders (Deki, 2008). The formal education structure in Bhutan consists of seven years of primary education (including pre-primary) and six years of secondary education. The latter comprises two years each of lower, middle and higher secondary education. This may be followed by a three-to-four-year degree programme at a few tertiary institutes in the country. Basic education extends from pre-primary to Class 10, and is legally available to every citizen in the country (Thinley, 2009).

The minimum official age of entry into the formal education system is six at pre-primary (Class PP) level. Primary schooling (Classes PP–6) is provided in the community primary, primary, lower secondary and some of the middle secondary schools. Lower secondary schooling (Classes 7 and 8) is provided in the lower, middle and some higher secondary schools, while Classes 9–10 are provided in middle and higher secondary schools. Access to post-basic education (Class 11) in government-administered schools is based on the students' performance in the national examinations at the end of class 10. After completion of basic education up to Class 10, the next level is pre-university (higher secondary), which lasts two years. Students who are unable to gain access to pre-university courses either repeat or opt for

vocational training institutes. Others, who can afford the fees, go outside the country for class 11 or join the private higher secondary schools that offer class 11. Students who qualify after completion of high school (class 12) receive a government scholarship to continue their education at tertiary level at the Royal University of Bhutan. In addition, a small number of students are selected for government scholarships to pursue professional studies abroad, while others who can afford it receive tertiary education both in Bhutan and abroad (Deki 2008). The Ministry of Education is responsible for the development of the overall national education system of the country, including tertiary education. Within the Ministry of Education, the Department of Adult and Higher education (DAHE) oversees all aspects of tertiary, non-formal and adult education. The department shoulders this responsibility through three divisions: the Scholarships Division (SD), the Tertiary Education Division (TED) and the Non-formal and Continuing Education Division (NFCED) (Deki, 2008).

Recognition practices
In the formal school setting the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE) (class X) and Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate (BHSEC) (class XII), awarded by the Bhutan Board of Examinations, has been recognised by the following bodies in India: 1) The Association of Indian Universities (AIU), Delhi; 2) The Council of the Boards of School Education (COBSE); 3) The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE); and 4) The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE) (BBE n.d.).

In Bhutan, the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) has adapted to local needs. However, formal schools follow a summative assessment system. The Bhutan Board of Examinations conducts the examination and sets the benchmarks for the assessment (BBE, 2012).

Lifelong learning
While Bhutan does not have a policy and legislation for lifelong learning, several initiatives geared towards lifelong learning, such as community learning centres, resource centres, continuing and distance education, have been established.

According to the Ministry of Education (2008), NFE programmes are being undertaken at three levels: a basic literacy programme, a post-literacy programme, and a self-learning programme. The self-learning programme is part of the continuing education programme and aims to provide lifelong learning opportunities in Bhutan. Major activities of this programme include the promotion of reading and skills training within community learning centres (CLCs). (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The demand for such programmes comes from aspiring learners. The government provides support to individuals who would like to pursue lifelong learning programmes. While numerous activities are undertaken under the umbrella of lifelong learning, up to now there are no means to validate the learning outcomes.

The management structure of non-formal education can be seen in Figure 10.1: the 'general management structure' comprises the centre, the ministry, right down to the community and 'operational management structure', with involvement of various stakeholders in

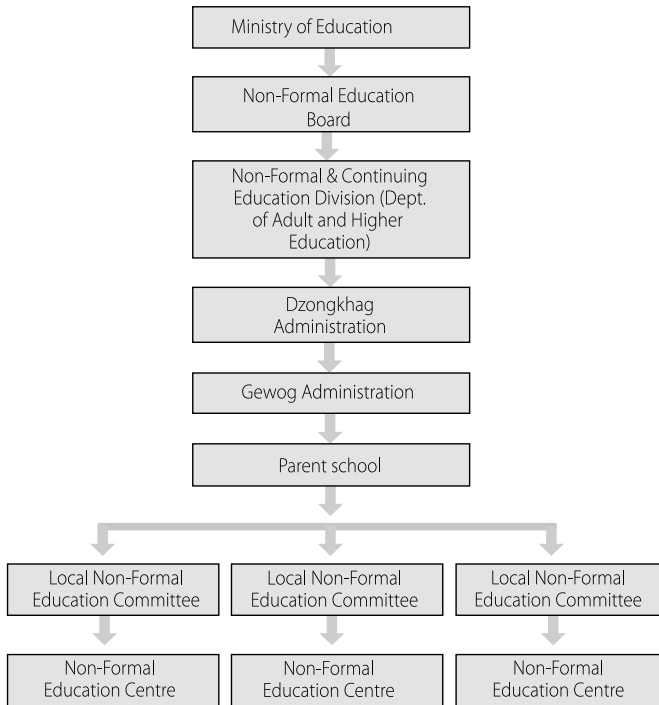**General Management Structure of Non-Formal Education**

Figure 10.1 General management structure of non-formal education. Source: Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2008.

implementing programmes and activities at the district and community levels. Detailed roles and responsibilities are disseminated to various managers for compliance (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Government roles and responsibilities

The non-formal and continuing education division (NFCED) promotes short-term and long-term polices on non-formal education and provides policy level directives for implementation. It also develops programmes for the implementation of the national literacy campaign, promotes awareness and commitment to non-formal education, develops curriculum and relevant literacy materials, conducts training courses for NFE instructors and managers, monitors and evaluates programmes, and provides professional support.

The *dzongkhags* (there are twenty dzongkhags – administrative districts – in Bhutan) administer non-formal education programmes. Furthermore, they coordinate and support *gups* (a gup is an elected headman) in their promotion of literacy programmes. They also approve the establishment of new non-formal education centres, recruit new non-formal

education instructors, and evaluate and monitor the progress of the new centres, in addition to providing necessary support.

Operational Management Structure ot Non-Formal Education in Dzongkhag

Dzongkhag NFE Committee:
Dasho Dzongdag: Chairperson
DEO: Member Secretary
All Sector Heads: Members

Dzongkhag Education Officer
and Assistant DEO

Local NFE Committee comprising:
Gup or Chimi
Head Teacher
Tshogpa
NFE teacher/instructor
Village elders
Learner representative
Chairperson: To be elected

Basic Literacy Course Centres:

· NFE Instructors/teachers
· Offer facility to complete the basic literacy course as prescribed by the NFE Division

Community Learning Centres:

Offer and facilitate following courses
· post literacy course for neo-literate
· Library and information service
· Vocational/functional skills training
· Early childcare service centre
· Co-operative services

Post Literacy Course Centres:

NFE Instructors/teachers
Offer and facilitate following
· Post Literacy Courses
· Library and information service
· Social and recreational services
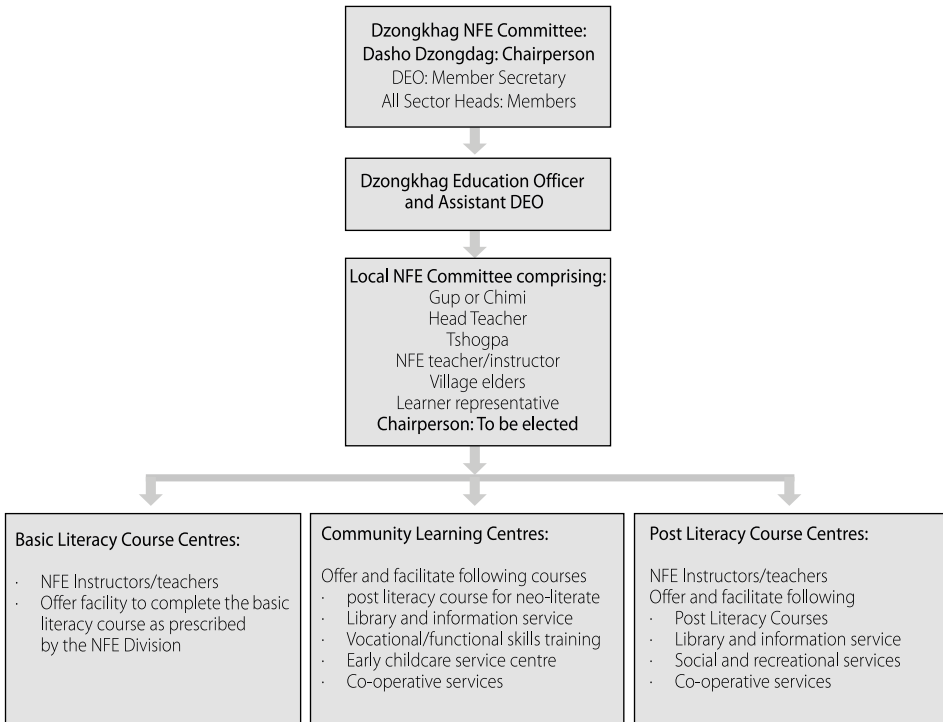· Co-operative services

Figure 10.2 Operational management structure of non-formal education in a dzongkhag. Source: Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2008.

Gups are responsible for formulating short-term and long-term plans for the non-formal education programme in their *gewog* (a group of villages forming a geographic administrative unit below dzongkhag). Gups receive approval to establish new non-formal education centres from the dzongkhag. They then set up local non-formal education committees charged with establishing new non-formal education centres.

Parent schools support their LNFECs in the establishment of new NFE centres in matters relating to stationery, textbooks and other materials, instructor salaries and verification of progress reports submitted by instructors, conducting LNFEC meetings, field visits and monitoring of programmes.

Non-formal education instructors are expected to create a conducive learning environment. They continuously assess learners' performance and provide remedial help. In addition, they are engaged in organisational tasks such as preparing requisitions for stationery, textbooks and other materials, which they submit to early childcare services (ECS), or their regional education store through the parent school (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The aim of NFE programmes is not to prepare the learners for job opportunities, but to provide basic functional literacy to target groups such as out-of-school youth and adults who have missed formal education system, or dropped out of the formal education system. Its further aims are to empower and improve quality of life by providing relevant life skills (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Challenges

Bhutan lacks the technical expertise to develop a national qualification framework. Also, most of its non-formal education programmes are new and are not recognised by the formal sector, and no budgetary funding has been allocated to research and development of an RVA framework.

Bhutan faces grave challenges in terms of higher education, as there is pressing demand for post-secondary opportunities owing to the increase in enrolment at primary and secondary education levels. As a result, Bhutan depends greatly on tertiary institutions outside the country, leading to an exodus of students to India and other countries. The lack of institutional autonomy in terms of financing and resources, both human and material, constrains the progressive growth of both staff and campuses (Thinley, 2009).

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The NVQF and skills recognition

Ram Lakhan Singh

Introduction

India has a population of 1.2 billion people with 523 million people in the labour force. However, of this workforce, only 8 per cent work in the formal economy and 92 per cent in the informal economy (32 per cent in the rural unorganised sector, and 60 per cent in the urban unorganised sector).

India is a federal country with 28 states and seven union territories. The literacy rate is 61 per cent. In India the languages spoken are as follows: Hindi 41 per cent; Bengali 8.1 per cent; Telugu 7.2 per cent; Marathi 7.2 per cent; Tamil 5.9 per cent; Urdu 5 per cent; Gujarati 4.5 per cent; Kannada 3.7 per cent; Malayalam 3.2 per cent; Oriya 3.3 per cent; Punjabi 2.8 per cent; Assamese 1.3 per cent; Maithili 1.2 per cent; other 5.9 per cent.

The traditional system of informal education, known as the *Gurukul* system, is an ancient Indian concept of education, wherein the participants receive knowledge by residing with their teacher as part of his family. The teacher (*Guru*) acts as guide, father and role-model. Even kings and princes spent their student days living with the teacher, normally in forests. The *Gurukul* system involved training in weaponry, music, art, self defence and religious teachings. At the end of their training, students emerged as responsible individuals. However, this institution was only accessible to the ruling and elite classes.

Craftsmen and artisans learned their skills from family or community elders. Thus, skills were passed down and refined from generation to generation. Such arts and crafts were always protected and promoted by rulers, but without documentary certification. Thus, traditional systems of education and training were not accompanied by any formal system of recognition, even though such skills were valued and recognised by society. Even today there are millions of artisans and craft workers across the country, whose skills are not formally certified but are recognised by society and valued by business.

Lifelong learning policies

The National Policy on Education (NPE) – instituted in 1986 and modified in 1992 – (MHRD, 1992) noted the rigidity of the formal education system and moved in the direction of open and distance learning. It also accepted that lifelong education is a cherished goal of the educational process. The principal objectives of the NPE are as follows:
1. Opportunities should be provided to youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers, and professionals to continue the education of their choice, at a pace suited to them;
2. Technical and management education programmes, including education in polytechnics, should follow a flexible modular pattern based on credits, with provision for multi-point entry. A strong guidance and counselling service should also be provided;
3. Non-formal education programmes intended for school dropouts, for children from villages without schools, working children, and girls who cannot attend whole day schools, should be strengthened. Non-formal flexible and need-based vocational pro-

grammes should also be made available to neo-literates, youths who have completed primary education, school dropouts, persons engaged in work, the unemployed, or partially employed persons;
4. Special attention in this regard should be given to women; and
5. Vocational education should be kept as a distinct stream, intended to span several areas of activity and prepare students for identified occupations. These courses will ordinarily be provided after secondary stage, but they may also be made available after class VIII.

In February 2009, India adopted a national policy on skills development, which while acknowledging the huge numbers in need of skills training, sought to guide the skills development strategies and initiatives of all stakeholders. The national skill development policy seeks to:
1. Increase capacity and capability of the existing system to ensure equitable access to all;
2. Promote lifelong learning, maintain quality and relevance according to changing requirements;
3. Create effective convergence between school education, various skill-development efforts of government and between the government and private sectors;
4. Enhance the capacity of institutions for planning, quality assurance and involvement of stakeholders;
5. Create institutional mechanisms for research development, quality assurance, etc.; and
6. Increase participation of all stakeholders to mobilise adequate financial, physical and intellectual resources.

This national policy seeks to develop a skilled workforce of 500 million people by 2022 and hopes to accomplish this goal through high levels of inclusion, accountability and coherence. India's operational strategies will require innovative techniques. The country needs to create a skills framework based on openness and flexibility, which will permit people to accumulate knowledge and skills and convert them through testing and certification to higher diplomas and degrees.

In 2008 the following co-ordinating bodies were created for skills development: 1) National Council on Skills Development, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, as an apex institution for policy direction and review; 2) National Skill Development co-ordination board, under chairmanship of the Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, to plan strategies for implementing decisions of the National Council; 3) National Skill Development Corporation, to promote private initiative in skill development.

India's national qualifications framework
The national qualifications framework is on the current agenda of the Indian Government. Various initiatives have already taken place, such as the constitution of a task force in the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), and implementation of a national policy on skill development by the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE).

Through the establishment of the national vocational qualification framework (NVQF), India seeks to provide quality-assured learning pathways with standards comparable to any international qualification framework. This framework forms the basis of India's approach to lifelong learning and continuous up-grading of skills and knowledge. It is proposed that all available resources, including public institutions, be used to host lifelong learning. The learning courses will be welded to the national vocational qualification framework to maintain dynamism and will be open to feedback. In order to encourage lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning, India intends to develop competency standards and a certification system for its large segment of unorganised sector workers. This is being incorporated into the national testing and certification system. India is in the process of developing vocational counselling and career guidance to cater for present and future needs. It is proposed that information on employment trends and training opportunities be continually made available to motivate workers and enable them to acquire and continually upgrade their skills and knowledge.

The aims of the NVQF are to stimulate and support reforms in skills development and to facilitate national and international comparability of qualifications. All existing institutions, councils and boards under various ministries involved in skills development will be encouraged to follow NVQF.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have been established to facilitate greater participation of social partners and cover all employment sectors. The task of building a skills development system adequate to the extent of potential requirements is just too large for the public sector to achieve on its own. Sector Skills Councils will be responsible for:

1. Identifying skills development needs, including preparing a catalogue of types, range and depth of skills to choose from;
2. Developing a sector skills development plan and maintenance of a skill inventory;
3. Determining skills/competency standards and qualifications;
4. Standardising the affiliation and accreditation process;
5. Accreditation, examination and certification;
6. Planning and carrying out the training of tutors;
7. Promotion of academies of excellence; and
8. Establishing a well-structured sector-specific labour market information system (LMIS) to assist in the planning and delivery of training.

In the meanwhile, it should be noted that the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) initiated the process for establishing the National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF) at the 57th session of the Central Advisory Board Of Education (CABE) Committee meeting held on 19th June, 2010 in New Delhi. It highlighted the need for a National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF) rather than a NVQF (MHRD, 2011). The aim is to provide "a common reference framework for linking various vocational qualifications and setting common principles and guidelines for a nationally recognized qualifications system and standards" (IAMR, 2011). In the year 2012, the Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development announced the National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF). NVEQF is organized as a series of levels of competences/skills, arranged in ascending order from Recognition of Prior Learning

(RPL) 1 and RPL 2, leading to Levels 1 to 10 of formal qualifications. NVEQF levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes; i.e., the competencies which the learners must possess regardless of whether they were acquired through formal, non formal or informal education and training (MHRD, 2012).

		Case I	Case II	
Level	Certificate	Equivalence	Equivalence	Certifying Body
10	NCC 8	Degree	Doctorate	University and SSC^
9	NCC 7			University and SSC^
8	NCC 6		Masters Degree	University and SSC^
		PG Diploma		
7	NCC 5	Advanced Diploma *	Bachelors Degree**	*Board of Technical Education and SSC^
6	NCC 4			**University and SSC^
5	NCC 3			*Board of Technical Education, and SSC^ **School Board and SSC^
4	NCC 2	Diploma*	Grade XII**	
3	NCC 1		Grade XI**	
2	NCWP 2	Grade X	Grade X	School Board and SSC^
1	NCWP 1	Grade IX	Grade IX	School Board and SSC^
RPL	RPL 2	Grade VIII	Grade VIII	NIOS /State Open Schools and SSC^
	RPL 1	Grade V	Grade V	NIOS /State Open Schools and SSC^

Table 11.1
The Indian National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF). Source: MHRD, 2012.

RPL= Recognition of Prior Learning; NCWP = National Certificate for Work Preparation; NCC = National Competency Certificate; ^ = Joint certification with industry (Sector Skill Councils) would entail assessment for skills by SSC/industry; * = present Polytechnic Diploma where entry is after Class 8; ** = Advanced Diploma is third year of the present Polytechnic Diploma

While the focus of the NVEQF is on facilitating the progression from vocational secondary to higher education and providing a basis for comparability of general educational and vocational qualification, the NVQF will focus on skills recognition in the organised and the unorganised sectors, integrating formal training and traditional non-formal training, especially workplace learning, and offering vertical mobility from vocational to academic learning. It will promote lifelong learning through improved skills recognition, and recognition of prior learning – formal, non-formal and informal (MoLE, 2009; see also Singh, 2012). The intention of the Indian Government is to integrate the NVEQF and the NVQF into the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) that is under development within the India-EU Skills Development Project (MHRD, 2012).

Skills development pathways in India

India has a three-tier system of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). They are known as industrial training institutes (ITI), polytechnics, and engineering colleges. ITIs provide trade-specific training programmes of one-, two- or three-year duration. The ITIs produce semi-skilled workers and mechanics for the shop floor in organised and unorganised sectors of the economy. The polytechnics produce technicians/supervisors and foremen, and the engineering colleges produce professional engineers. There are also vocational schools and technical schools, which produce mechanics and technicians in different fields. Although there are twenty ministries involved in skill development, the two major ministries are the MHRD and the MoLE.

Vocational secondary education

The MHRD has taken steps for greater vocationalisation of secondary education, emphasising the services sector and focusing on developing soft skills and computer literacy. The major aims of the restructured approach are to provide for multi-entry, multi-exit learning opportunities, vertical mobility/inter-changeability in qualifications, filling the gap between education and employment. The ultimate goal is to prepare educated, employable and competitive human resources for various sectors of the national economy and the global market. At tertiary level there are many open universities (such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, New Delhi), Ambedkar Open University Hyderabad, etc.) offering vocational education, skills development and work-integrated learning-schemes through community colleges. The IGNOU at present offers 338 programmes of study through over 35,000 courses to a cumulative student body of over 300,000 (MHRD, 2011).

Vocational training outside the formal schooling cycle

The Ministry of Labour and Employment is the nodal ministry for vocational training. Vocational training through ITIs falls outside the formal schooling system, though it is institution based. Vocational training is provided through more than 5,000 institutes, offering 107 trades for students with 8th–12th class qualification. The duration of the training is 6–36 months. Graduates of ITIs/ITCs are viewed as semi-skilled workers. Shop floor training or apprenticeships are offered through 24,700 establishments in 188 trades to students with 8th–12th class qualification and ITI certificate. The graduates of such training are perceived as skilled workers. The NQF will include a credible system of certification which will ensure that skills are portable and recognised across sectors, industries, enterprises and educational institutions.

In order to provide marketable skills, the Ministry of Labour and Employment developed a strategic framework to provide employable skills to school leavers, existing workers, ITI graduates, etc. The skill development initiative (SDI) through modular employable skills (MES) is a competency-based training pathway providing the minimum skill sets needed for gainful employment. A trade committee identifies courses that provide competences meeting the demands of industry and the labour market and it develops a course matrix and curriculum. Learners acquire employable skills in a shorter time and more flexible manner. The institutes providing MES training have to be accredited by a so-called apex committee

that assesses labour market demand and invites applications from vocational training providers. The testing of skills is done by independent bodies. (DGE and T 2008). The modular employable skills initiative (MES) involves 5,200 vocational training providers, 22 assessing bodies; 48 sectors, and 1,109 modules, which take anywhere from 60 to 600 hours. There are different levels of programmes (foundation level as well as skill up-gradation) to meet the demands of various target groups. Courses are available for persons having completed 5th standard. There is testing and certification of skills that are acquired informally. Trainees' skills are tested by independent bodies that are not involved in training delivery, to ensure that it is done impartially. With the establishment of the NVQF, certification will be nationally and internationally recognised.

Non-formal education and training: Literacy and adult education
Adult education and training has until recently been a neglected pathway within the education and training system. Despite growing investment in education, 30 per cent of the population is illiterate and only 50 per cent of students reach high school. About 60 per cent of school students drop out at different stages before reaching Class-X. In order to strengthen the link between second-chance non-formal learning and the formal education system through equivalency programmes, the National Literacy Mission Authority (Mission, 2012) under the Department of School Education and Literacy, in the Ministry of HRD has developed several programmes.

1. Functional literacy programmes are equivalent to standard III in the formal school system. The programme *Saakshar Bharat* (Literate India) launched by the Prime Minister of India in 2009 focuses on female neo-literates aged 15 years or older. The goal of the programme is to develop the skills of the neo-literates by providing support for literacy and post-literacy linked to vocational education. NGOs and voluntary agencies are active in this programme, which benefits 70 million people. The focus is on providing marketable skills to improve livelihood opportunities.

2. An important second-chance pathway is the basic education and equivalency programme up to the level of Class 10, which is being implemented in collaboration with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). The NIOS offers 82 vocational education courses through its accredited vocational institutions (AVIs), which include government institutes, NGOs and registered societies. To date, 1,063 accredited vocational institutes (AVIs) provide training to neo-literates up to pre-degree level (MHRD, 2011). The NIOS curriculum is equivalent to class 3, Class 5 and Class 8, at its own three levels of A, B and C. (NIOS, 2006). Equivalency programmes include both academic and vocational content.

3. Vocational and skills development through community polytechnics is another pathway for marginalised adults. Within the national mission on skills development and vocational education (Planning Commission, 2007), a new sub-mission for polytechnics has been set up by MHRD (2011). There is also a proposal to set up an additional programme entitled Community Development Through Polytechnics (CDTP), in which each polytechnic runs short-term non-formal skills development programmes through 5–10 extension centres in nearby villages (MHRD, 2011). The *Jan shikshan*

sansthan programme (adult education) meets the educational and vocational training needs of illiterate and neo-literate young people and adults in urban and rural India, and are run by voluntary agencies with financial assistance from the government. The aim of this programme is to offer vocational training programmes for illiterate and neo-literate people, those from weaker socio-economical groups, disadvantaged groups, the unskilled and unemployed. The Ministry of Rural Development, the Khadi and Village Industries Commission, as well as the Department of Women and Child Welfare are government schemes that reach out to unemployed youth, women, and trainers in rural areas (MHRD, 2011).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has an important role in imparting skills training for employment, self-employment and enterprises, facilitating a process of economic empowerment for marginalised people. The thrust is to integrate market-driven strategies into the design and implementation of training strategies for poor and marginalised groups. The training content is driven by a people-centred and local-demand pedagogy, which upgrades locally available skills, and empowers people to secure livelihoods and face any crisis in their jobs.

Recognition practices

The NVEQF states that institutions with requisite experience, such as the National Institute of Open Schooling, will be authorised to conduct assessment through RPL at the lower rungs, and through community colleges/polytechnics at the higher levels. Objectives of RPL will be two pronged: (I) recognition of prior learning or qualifications acquired outside the learning path; and (II) recognition of credits obtained through formal learning. This would lead to career progression and skills up-grading, as well as engagement of the experienced practitioners as resource persons. Given its mandate, NIOS has developed the framework for the Recognition of Prior Learning (NIOS, 2013).

NIOS has also been engaged in assessment and certification of the competency levels of neo-literates under the Saakshar Bharat Mission, a flagship programme of the Government of India. The main objectives of assessment of neo-literates are to (I) assess the proficiency levels of attained functional literacy skills, (II) to recognize achievements at basic literacy level through certification, and (III) to enhance informal experience and provide equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills. NIOS further provides qualification equivalent to formal educational system and establish learning for neo-literates beyond basic literacy. This provides further educational opportunities to neo-literate adults, who can achieve a qualification which gives them access to further studies. NIOS has also developed resource material including the skill programmes for the A,B,C level, which are equivalent to Class 3, Class 5 and Class 8 levels of formal schooling. Recognising the skills of workers in the unorganised sector is one of the aims of NVEQF. Workers with few or no formal qualifications have the greatest difficulty securing decent employment. Tailor-made skills recognition and certification programmes can help to enhance the employability and social mobility of otherwise disadvantaged groups.

While there is an absence of formal skills development, the contribution of the informal sector to GDP cannot be ignored. Rather, the informal sector, with its productive skills, has potential which needs to be made visible. The creativity and the competences of the people could be utilised for social development. Thus, it is important for the individual, and equally for society and the economy, to identify and document available competences that have not been formally recognised. Apart from having an intrinsic value for the individual, recognition and validation could encourage people to start a qualification; the learning that is recognised could be transferable (to the formal sector), and especially at the interfaces where the informal economy connects with the formal economy. It could reduce the amount of time needed to complete a certification and therefore require less time away from the workplace. Formally recognising workers' skills could be a means of gaining opportunities for further learning and for enhancing employability and labour mobility. For the micro-enterprises in the informal sector, a better recognition of workers' skills could be a way to overcome skills shortages and match skills demand with supply. It could also provide an opportunity to improve the overall skill level and work performance of an industry operating in the informal sector. The nation would have a better certified, empowered, mobile and multi-skilled workforce which would attract investors to the micro-enterprise sector. The skill level and educational attainment of the workforce determines their productivity, income levels and adaptability.

It is important also to mention ILO Recommendation 195 within a framework for recognition and certification of skills (ILO, 2004). According to this, "Measures should be adopted in consultation with the social partners and using a national qualification framework, to promote the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills including prior learning and previous experience, irrespective of the countries where they were acquired and whether acquired formally or informally" (Ibid., p. 6).

Manipal City & Guilds, an India-UK joint venture, is conducting RPL among construction workers in India (City & Guilds Manipal Global, 2012). It has come to the conclusion that the success of RPL in the informal sector is contingent upon the existence of a nationally shared qualifications and credit framework. The City & Guilds of India believes that RPL is the cornerstone for skills development.

Challenges

There are major challenges for skills recognition in India, especially in the huge unorganised sector. The process of recognition must be accompanied by the provision of public infrastructure that is affordable, reliable and efficient. There will be challenges in identifying where skills exist, documenting those skills, communicating to the potential candidates, and administering the process. Methods will need to be established, such as portfolio review, written/oral exams, and demonstrations. A relatively open examination system relating to a national qualifications framework and the relevant standards would need to be created for more transparency, so that it benefits those people who have had to acquire their skills under conditions of great hardship outside the education system.

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The Academic Credit Bank and the Lifelong Learning Account System[4]
Eun Soon Baik

Introduction

Previously, non-formal modes of higher education in Korea were not given formal recognition or credits, and school education was considered as the sole domain of education. Non-formal education was underestimated, even though it provided people with practical knowledge and skills. The Korean Academic Credit Bank System recognises learning not only in school but also beyond school in diverse vocational training and skills related contexts. Moreover, the Lifelong Learning Account System (LLAS) allows individuals to accumulate different lifelong learning experiences, and to 'invest' their learning experiences by moving up the career ladder.

The Korean qualification framework

The Republic of Korea is in the process of implementing the Korean Qualifications Framework (KQF) (APEC, 2009). Like the European Qualifications Framework, the KQF is designed to recognise knowledge, skills, and ability. It is based on the Korean Skill Standard (KSS) which designates the level of skills and competences attained in academic, non-academic, formal, non-formal and workplace learning.

PATHWAY	DOCUMENT	AGENCY
Completing standardised curriculum	Attendance book (attendance rate should be more than 80 %) Academic transcript (score should be higher than 60)	Education and training institutions affiliated to ACBS
Acquiring national certificate or officially recognised private certificate	Original or copy of certificate	Relevant organisation or institution
Passing Bachelor's degree for self-education or completing courses for exam exemption	No need for extra document Database in NILE	NILE (Bachelor's Degree and Consultation Division)
Completing curriculum at credit-recognised school	(Academic) transcript	Universities / Colleges
Completing curriculum through part-time enrolment	(Academic) transcript	Universities / Colleges
Holding or completing training to acquire skills of important, intangible properties	Confirmation of holding or completing training to acquire skills of important, intangible properties	Relevant organisation or institution

Table 12.1 The agencies and documents associated with different pathways for obtaining credits.

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[4] Unless otherwise stated, all data and information are based on the internal data in National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE).

Although the Korean Qualifications Framework and the Korean Skills Standard have not yet been established, the recognition and accreditation of prior learning and the non-formal mode of learning have developed in tandem. The recognition and accreditation of prior learning and non-formal education can be developed without a national framework that places knowledge, skills or competences at a certain level. Both the Academic Credit Bank System and the Lifelong Learning Account System were developed without any link to KQF or KSS.

The national lifelong learning policy

A legal basis for policies and legislation in the Republic of Korea is based on the Constitution, the Framework Act on Education, and the Lifelong Education Act. Paragraph 5, Article 31 of the Constitution stipulates that the Republic of Korea shall promote lifelong learning education. Article 3 of the Framework Act on Education declares that every citizen has a right to receive an education according to their ability and capability during their lifetime.

The Lifelong Education Act (LEA) provides the legal framework for lifelong education in Korea. It has strengthened the government's obligation to promote lifelong education, to make a basic plan on lifelong education, and establish national and local institutes for lifelong education. The Lifelong Education Act required the Republic of Korea to establish a National Institute for Lifelong Education (NILE) to promote lifelong learning. NILE is responsible for the government's lifelong education policy, its planning, execution, evaluation and management. Moreover, NILE has nine specific functions:

1. Carry out surveys on lifelong education;
2. Develop a national plan;
3. Undertake programme development;
4. Train lifelong education professionals;
5. Establish networks connecting lifelong education agencies and organisations;
6. Support local institutes for lifelong education;
7. Operate the Lifelong Education Information System;
8. Operate the Academic Credit Bank System; and
9. Manage and support the Lifelong Learning e-Account System (Article 19 of the Lifelong Education Act).

The Korean government has produced comprehensive plans to promote lifelong learning, starting in 2002. A second national lifelong learning development plan (2008–2012) was introduced, with three major goals: cultivation of creative knowledge workers; improving social integration through networking; and building a foundation for lifelong education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2007).

Recognition practices

Korea has two closely related systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning; the academic credit bank system, and the lifelong learning account system (LLAS).

The academic credit bank system (ACBS)

The ACBS is an open-education system that recognises not only learning experiences gained in school but also those gained outside school (UNESCO, BKK n.d.). People with various educational backgrounds may obtain a bachelor's or associate degree through ACBS. In Article 1 of the Act on Recognition of Credits, the aim of the ACBS is defined as follows: "This law aims to provide those who have completed recognised curricula with the opportunity to acquire a degree through credit recognitions. It thereby embodies the principle of lifelong learning and contributes to national and individual development".

Recognition and accreditation of non-formal learning

The ACBS documents and recognises outcomes from various non-formal learning activities by granting credits and conferring degrees when certain numbers of credits are accumulated. At the moment, six sources of credits recognised by the ACBS:

1. Formal higher education institutions;
2. Recognised non-formal education and training institutions;
3. Completion of the 'accredited important intangible cultural properties' curriculum;
4. Part-time courses;
5. Acquisition of national skill/qualifications (above the level of industrial technician); and
6. Exemption exam courses in the system of academic degree acquisition through self-education. (www.cb.or.kr)

Of the six recognised sources of credits, those from formal higher education institution, and those obtained by taking part-time courses, are from university. These credits are mostly accepted regardless of when they were awarded. Credits obtained by acquiring national skill/qualification (5) and credits acquired by passing examinations (6) depend on the level of difficulty of the exam. Accreditation in ACBS mostly applies to credits obtained in non-formal education and training institutions.

Accreditation of educational programmes

Accreditation involves the formal evaluation of non-formal educational institutions and their subjects to determine whether the quality of their programmes and courses is equivalent to those of universities or colleges. Some of the accreditation criteria are as follows:

- Instructors must have at least the same qualifications as a full-time professor at a junior college.
- Classroom environment and equipment must be good enough for teaching and learning.
- Programmes must comply with the standardised curriculum and syllabus for each subject.

About 500 education and training institutions participate in the ACBS. The procedure of accreditation is as follows:

   a. The Ministry of Education develops the basic plan of accreditation.
   b. NILE acts according to the Ministry of Education's overall plan.
   c. The Ministry of Education and NILE announce guidelines and directions for accredited institutions and other possible candidate institutions through official letters and/or daily newspapers.
   d. Any educational institution may apply for accreditation by submitting the necessary documents to NILE.
   e. NILE screens the submitted documents with the advice of specialists in each subject area as well as in lifelong learning.
   f. After evaluation of the documents, an evaluation team, including members of NILE, subject specialists and administrators, conduct an on-site follow-up evaluation.
   g. NILE develops a final evaluation report and submits it to a screening committee for academic accreditation, and then forwards the report to the Ministry of Education.
   h. The Ministry of Education issues final approval and sends a certificate of accreditation to each institution.

These criteria apply equally to all applicants. Learners may be helped by an advisor or consultant in each educational institution or by the ACBS consulting team who help them in planning the course, taking the appropriate subject, or finding ways to be adequately assessed. However, the ACBS is responsible for assessing the result, not the process. Credits are given to learners when they meet the requirements.

ACBS comprises formal, non-formal and informal elements. Among the six sources of credits, those from recognised non-formal education and training institutions obtained by completing a standardised curriculum are directly related to the recognition of non-formal education. Credits obtained by acquiring national or officially recognised qualifications, and credits acquired by passing Bachelor's degree examinations can be referred to as informal learning since these credits can be achieved by one's own effort without attending any formal classes. Credits obtained by completing the accredited important intangible cultural properties curriculum are directly connected to informal learning recognition, since these are achieved in the workplace.

Individuals who have accumulated diverse learning experiences in informal or non-formal learning settings must submit documentary evidence to obtain credits. The necessary documents and agencies or different channels for obtaining credits are set out in Table 12.1.

Degree conferment
The degree conferred through ACBS is equivalent to a bachelor's or associate degree under the Higher Education Act. The degree is conferred by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology or the president of the university or college. In order to acquire the degrees, candidates must meet the requirements set out in Table 12.2. To date, the total number of credits through ACBS has risen to more than 200,000.

Classification	Bachelor's degree	Associate degree		Remarks
		2 year	3 year	
Total credits	140 or higher	80 or higher	120 or higher	A minimum of 18 credits should be taken from ACBS-affiliated institutions or other recognised institutions
Major subject	60 credits or higher	45 credits or higher	54 credits or higher	
General subject	30 credits or higher	15 credits or higher	21 credits or higher	

Table 12.2 Requirements for obtaining Bachelor's or associate degree.

Legal effect of ACBS
The associate and bachelor degrees conferred through ACBS are equivalent to those of a university or college under the Higher Education Act. While there is no legal discrimination between university graduates and the ACBS degree holders, there is still doubt about the quality of education in ACBS and the social prestige that the degrees carry.

Lifelong learning account system (LLAS)
The lifelong learning account system serves as an e-portfolio and curriculum vitae of an individual's lifelong learning activities. Through LLA, individuals' diverse learning experiences are accumulated and managed within an online learning account. Unlike ACBS, the learning results include not only higher education levels, but various kinds and grades of learning experiences. It helps each individual to study and record his/her learning experience. Learning results can be used as educational credits or qualifications. The lifelong learning account is like a savings account for lifelong education. An individual can set up his or her own account, deposit different lifelong learning experiences, and plan ahead about how to 'invest' learning experiences in moving up the career ladder.

Overview of LLAS
Since LLAS is a comprehensive system, it tries to connect to other related systems. For example, it incorporates information from both the academic qualifications system and the vocational qualifications system. A person who graduated from a certain high school, or university, or ACBS, can obtain a graduation certificate from the LLAS system. In addition to the graduation certificate, his diverse learning experience can be recognised and approved by National Institute for Lifelong Learning (NILE). In short, every learning experience can be shown in one document for the convenience of learners.

Assessment-accreditation of a learning course
Individuals may register any course they have taken. However, if the course is not approved and assessed by NILE, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology does not guarantee its quality. Assessment is a formal evaluation of whether a learning course (lifelong education programme) meets the criteria set out by Ministry of Education and Science and

NILE. The following organisations can apply for assessment accreditation in accordance with Clause 2 under Article 2 of the Lifelong Education Act:

- Ministries, local government bodies, offices of education, schools (elementary school, junior high school, high school, college);
- Corporate bodies and organisations authorised by the Lifelong Education Act;
- Private institutions offering lifelong vocational education set up in accordance with the Act on the Establishment and Operation of Private Teaching Institutes and Extracurricular Lessons, but excluding institutes for extracurricular lessons;
- Other facilities, corporate bodies and organisations with the principal purpose of lifelong education based on other laws and regulations.

Percentage of credits
(Non-formal, Informal, Formal)

Formal
52%

Non-formal
34%

Informal
14%
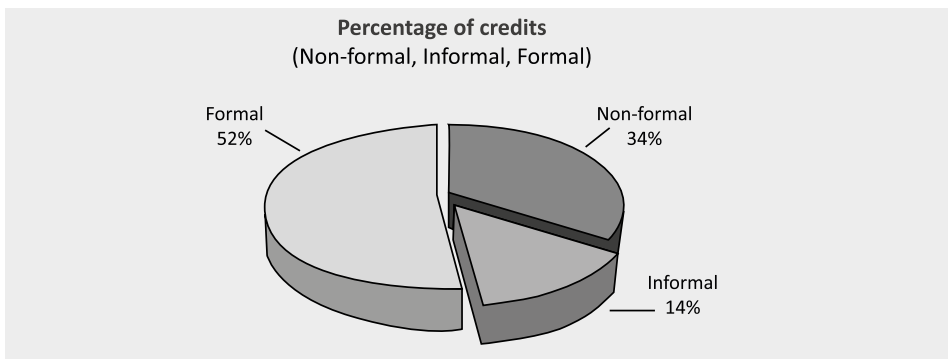
Figure 12.3 Percentage of credits earned in ACBS by form of education.

The assessment criteria include: 1) educational facilities and equipment; 2) teaching processes; 3) faculty members and lecturers; 4) management systems for learners; 5) other areas recognised by the Minister of Education, Science and Technology as necessary for the operation of learning courses. The procedure of assessment-accreditation is as follows:

1. A lifelong education institution completes the application for assessment-accreditation as specified by government notice, and submits it to the local government body in charge.
2. The local government body delivers the application to NILE.
3. NILE organises an assessment panel for each field, and each assessment panel conducts assessment in written form, in accordance with the assessment-accreditation criteria.
4. The Learning Account Advisory Council conducts a final review on the result of the written assessment.
5. The Minister of Education, Science and Technology gives final approval of the review from the Learning Account Advisory Council.
6. NILE notifies the local government body of the result of the final assessment-accreditation, which communicates the notification to the lifelong education institution.
7. The local government body and lifelong education institute begin the execution of the accredited learning course, and NILE oversees and supports the operation.

LLA-registered learning courses (lifelong learning courses)
Each individual should open his or her own account. In order to search for lifelong learning courses registered in LLA, he/she needs to go to [Search for Course] on the LLA Learning Experience Management System website (www.all.go.kr) and to search by institute/region/ field of study.

Accumulating learning records and utilising them as evidence	»	**e-portfolio**	❍ Accumulating, managing, and utilising one's learning records
		Evidence of learning records	❍ Submitting or utilizing evidence to enter school, acquire a qualification and get a job
Connection with completion at elementary school	»	**Completion of basic literacy education[a] courses**	❍ If adult learners completed the basic literacy education courses, these learning hours will be recognised as credits for required hours of the completion of elementary education.
Connection with completion at secondary school	»	**Exemption from certain subjects in the school qualification exam[b]**	❍ If adult learners completed 90 learning hours per subject, he/she becomes exempt from that subject.
		Credit recognition system of ACHS[c]	❍ If learners in ACHS completed a certain number of hours of learning registered with LLA, part of those hours can be recognised as credits for graduation.
As supporting documents for entering the labour market	»	**Employment and HR management**	❍ Using as an information on employment or personnel management by printing out a certificate of lifelong learning records

Figure 12.4 Utilising the learning records in a Lifelong Learning Account (LLA).

Notes on Figure 12.4:
a) Basic literacy education(Article 75 of the Lifelong Education Act): Lifelong Education for supporting literacy education; b) The school qualification exam (Regulations on Qualification Examinations for High School Entrance and Graduation): National Examination for qualifying entrance to middle and high school and college based on the Act on Education for Elementary and Middle School and the Act on Higher Education; c) The Air (Broadcasting) and Correspondence High School: Educational Institutions at high school level through broadcasting and correspondence(based on e-learning)-

Utilising learning records

Individuals can use their learning records to review their learning activities, check the fields they have studied, and plan further**.** Learning records can be used to gain a primary school certificate, for subject exemption in high school, and for public and private employment (see Figure 12.4).

Effects and benefits

The ACBS is an open educational system for providing higher education opportunities. It can raise the academic level of the entire society by providing opportunities to neglected groups to participate in higher education. In this way, it can activate lifelong education and improve social integration and social-cultural equality as well as enhance well-being and quality of life. The ACBS promotes and protects the right to learning by providing learning opportunities anytime and anywhere. In addition, it recognises diverse types of learning experiences.

The lifelong learning account system enables learners to plan their learning process systematically and accumulate learning outcomes in non-formal and informal settings. It also ensures that every learner has the right to choose from a variety of learning options, and furthermore also promotes self-directed learning. Finally, it helps to link learning achievements to general and vocational certification.

Challenges

The ACBS and the LLAS were developed without much connection to the Korean qualification framework (KQF), and the Korean skill standards (KSS). This is partly because KQF and KSS have not yet been established, and partly because Korean society is excessively dependent on academic qualifications, which hinders linkage between vocational and academic systems, and formal and non-formal systems.

In the case of the ACBS, which is directly linked to higher education qualifications, the need for KQF or KSS is relatively low. However, LLAS, which includes all levels and areas of training and education, requires a set of criteria that can be used across all sectors nationally and, hopefully, internationally. Although LLAS has tried to set down criteria, there is difficulty in establishing equivalence between sectors. Needless to say, if LLAS is linked to the KQF and KSS, it will be more reliable and convenient, not only for learners, but also for employers and educators.

The following major challenges have been identified:

- Establishing a partnership between the LLAS and the KQF and KSS.
- Professionalising portfolios for informal or non-formal learning.
- Strengthening social consensus on the value of informal and non-formal learning by improving their quality.
- Increasing national commitment and financial support.

Network with relevant government organisations such as the Ministry of Labour, and Ministry of Health and Welfare.

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The Malaysian Qualifications Framework and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Vikneswaran Gobaloo and Zita Mohd. Fahmi

Introduction

In contributing to the nation's capacity for growth the higher education sector must ensure quality educational programmes, research and graduates for the workforce. These require changes in the higher education sectors. One of the main drivers of change is the Malaysian qualifications framework. Malaysia has been categorised as a developing nation in South East Asia, with a population of approximately 28 million – multi-racial and multi-cultural with a federal political system. It achieved independence 54 years ago. Being a former British colony, its administrative systems, including the education system, still reflect this influence in many ways. The force of globalisation, regional developments and advances in ICT have prompted Malaysia to address human capital development comprehensively to ensure national sustainability and competitiveness. Malaysia's economic growth has driven forward development since the 1980s, and the government has shown its commitment to laying the ground for a knowledge-based economy, as seen in the five-year National Development Plan. Following this main national objective, the Prime Minister called for a 'higher education revolution' which led to the establishment of a new Ministry of Higher Education in 2004 and the launch, in August 2007, of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency.

Malaysian Qualifications Framework

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) succeeded two previous quality assurance bodies, the Lembaga Akreditasi Negara and the Quality Audit Division of the Ministry, which dealt with public and private higher education providers respectively. The two main functions of the MQA, as guardian of the framework, are to manage and implement the framework through the quality assurance system, such as programme accreditation, and its associated mechanisms. All types of higher education providers are brought into its purview (Allais 2010). 'Higher education providers' are those institutions which offer higher education qualifications that may be roughly considered as post-secondary education. Although accreditation is not compulsory according to the Malaysian Qualifications Act, it is made mandatory by other regulations and policy, thus ensuring compliance with the framework.

The Malaysian qualifications framework (MQF) took several years to develop – exploration exercises, a series of consultations with all key stakeholders and a national consultation finally led to approval by the government. It consists of eight levels of qualifications in higher education and currently excludes school qualifications. It consists of three sub-frameworks: a five-level skills qualifications framework for workplace-based, or short-term workplace-focused training, known as the National Occupational Skills Standards; a framework for vocational and technical qualifications awarded in the state polytechnics and community colleges; and a framework for higher education qualifications (Allais, 2010, p. 37). The main characteristics of the national qualifications system are shown in Figure 13.1.
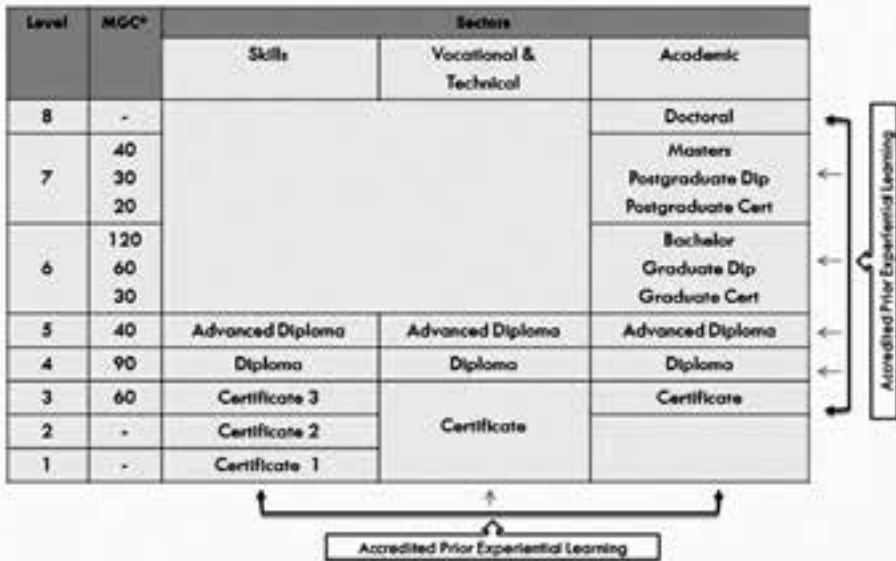
Figure 13.1 Malaysian Qualifications Framework. Source: Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2007.

The MQF is designed to be a unified system of qualifications offered on a national basis by all educational and training institutions, which include colleges, universities, vocational institutions, professional bodies and other higher educational institutions in the public and private sector, as well as workplace training and lifelong learning experiences (*Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*). The key objectives of the MQF are to

1. secure the standards of qualifications and reinforce policies on quality assurance;
2. ensure accuracy and consistency of nomenclature of qualifications;
3. support flexible education by providing pathways; and
4. to recognise prior learning.

The MQF encourages partnerships between public and private sector, links non-degree with undergraduate and postgraduate levels, encourages parity of esteem between professional and academic qualifications, establishes a common currency for credit accumulation and transfer, provides clear and accessible public information, and articulates links with qualifications from other countries (*Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia*). These key objectives are also stipulated in S. 35 of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007.

The MQF is an instrument that develops and classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that is agreed nationally and benchmarked with international practices, and which clarifies the academic levels, learning outcomes and credit system based on student academic load. These criteria are accepted and used for all qualifications awarded by higher education providers (MQR, 2009) as programme designers are generally expected to adhere to them. The implementation of the framework has been done in phases to allow for a smooth transition for existing programmes, while new ones since 2010 have been approved on the basis of whether

they meet the framework and quality assurance requirements as set by the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (2008). It must be noted that the capacity building workshops for institutions relating to the framework, particularly the learning outcomes, have been conducted continuously since 2008. In addition to the framework, programme (discipline) standards were introduced in 2008 to assist programme design and delivery in various fields of study.

Today programmes are accredited if they meet the requirements of the framework to enable them to be registered in the Malaysian qualifications register. Accreditation of a programme or qualification is the main quality mark for recognition by various authorities and bodies. Due to the high mobility of people – learners, students and employees – in the current age, recognition of qualifications has become an essential component to be addressed within the country and by the host or receiving country. In Malaysia today, recognition of non-professional qualifications is generally linked to the framework as it forms the benchmark for recognition.

The MQF is an important, if not crucial, instrument for realising lifelong learning policy in Malaysia, 'which is important in the development of a knowledge-based society and economy' (Agensi Kelayakan Malaysia, 2010). It provides flexible educational pathways for all learners as the qualifications within the different sectors are systematically linked to the framework (MQA, 2010). This will enable the individual to progress – vertically and horizontally – in higher education through transfer of credits and recognition of prior learning acquired from formal, non-formal and informal learning. MQF is especially designed to support open access to education and social groups for individuals who have missed higher education opportunities, allowing them to progress and enter knowledge arenas easily through education pathways. Work has been initiated in 2010 to allow cross-sector mobility – i.e. skills and academic competences.

Lifelong learning

When it was launched in August 2007, the National Higher Education Strategic Plans Beyond 2020 identified lifelong learning as one of the seven strategic areas to expand access to higher education and assist in building human capital. Work had been accumulating previously, but the plan gave fresh impetus to lifelong learning initiatives. The MQF is seen as the key vehicle to support this imperative. In 2009 major consultations took place at national level, through workshops by a technical team and culminated with a draft proposal on the national blueprint for lifelong learning (tentatively awaiting launch in November 2011). A national council was proposed even then. An inter-ministerial National Council for Lifelong Learning, chaired by the Minister of Higher Education and a technical committee chaired by the Secretary General of Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), have recently been established.

In spite of the fact that Malaysia has a well developed MQF, it lacks a clear, comprehensive and well-rounded national policy on lifelong learning. As a result, the country's many ministries, departments and institutions have essentially done their own thing. This is costly, dissipates limited resources and talent, and does not allow learners to progress in their learning achievements in a strategic way. A coherent policy framework is necessary if lifelong learning is to contribute to national development. A nation with a clear agenda to become

both a higher-income and knowledge-based society by the year 2020 cannot afford to remain passive in promoting lifelong learning.

There are two categories of learners in the country that need to be taken into account by the lifelong learning strategy; those who are under-represented across a whole range of basic and post-basic education and those that have had the benefit of some form of post-basic education but are not equipped to cope effectively in a technology-driven century. The first group requires active intervention by state, business, and voluntary organisations, and will include illiterate and neo-literate populations, ethnic, marginalised and minority groups, people with learning difficulties, girls and women, those living in remote locations and the physically challenged. The second group may already possess post-basic education and not require active intervention on the part of the state or business, but still need provisions that enable them to access learning resources. These people can be expected to know their needs and will include out-of-school youth, employees, people with basic education, professionals needing continuing education, and older adults (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2009).

A nationwide strategy must attempt to capture both groups. Such a strategy will exploit all available channels, actors, technologies and opportunities. It would also ensure that provisions and governance structures are created to support lifelong learning in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner. The strategies designed should encompass the following:
1. Instilling a national culture for lifelong learning;
2. Specifying the goals and objectives of lifelong learning in the country;
3. Providing platforms in taking forward lifelong learning in Malaysia;
4. Creating a role for ICT in lifelong learning;
5. Financing lifelong learning; and
6. Establishing a governance structure to promote and guide lifelong learning.

Such strategies were already being addressed in the MOHE strategies in late 2007 – with more input from the National PSH (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2009) blueprint in 2011.

Assessment of prior experiential learning in higher education institutions
There are currently six open universities approved to practice the open-entry system in order to promote open learning more aggressively and effectively. Such systems allow for a more flexible admission practice by institutions in providing higher education to adult learners who would otherwise be denied such opportunities. Assessment of prior experiential learning in these institutions may be conducted in the following ways:
1. A portfolio of evidence is compiled relating to the learning outcomes of a subject or course that the individual applies credit for (direct evidence based on what the applicant can demonstrate). The portfolio could consist of reports, job description, referee reports, essays, artefacts and products made, designs, drawings, plans, test results and so forth.
2. The knowledge and skills of an applicant are confirmed in writing by another person; i.e., direct evidence based on what others say or observe about the applicant.

The person could be the applicant's employer (e.g., manager and supervisor) or client (e.g., students and customers).

3. Examinations may be conducted in two forms: written and oral. Written examinations include test concepts, basic skills and applications. Examples of written examinations are multiple choice, true-false, matching, fill in the blank, essay, short answer, situation-based problem solving and standardised exam. Oral examinations provide an opportunity for the applicant to explain things verbally. There are many types of oral examinations that may be conducted by the institution: Structured oral test – candidates respond to pre-set questions; One-to-one interview – pre-set questions are not required but questions from the interviewer may flow from the candidates' responses; Panel interview – candidates are interviewed by a panel of examiners.

To ensure proper implementation, in 2009 the MQA developed guidelines for the accreditation of prior learning. In 2011 the MQA's work focused on developing instruments to assess prior learning, developing assessment criteria, and establishing assessment centres. One of several policy directions proposed to support lifelong learning is the provision of flexible entry points to various levels of qualification as set out in the MQF. Conventional higher education providers are to be allowed initially a 5 per cent enrolment of lifelong learners to the current total enrolment of students. A learner's credit account will also be created. Operators will be required to provide quality assurance mechanisms to ensure proper, effective and genuine admission and learning. Other measures, including financing and support systems, are also essential to lifelong learning plans.

Challenges
The average number of years a Malaysian adult spends in school is 6.8. Some nine million workers out of a force of 12 million have had fewer than nine years of schooling. This is not a comforting situation for a country that is among the 17 biggest trading nations in the world. Provision for lifelong and continuous learning is currently available for a small proportion of Malaysians; i.e., urban dwellers, professionals and special interest groups. These include a variety of provisions, through public as well as non-governmental channels. The challenge is to expand and improve current provisions to serve all Malaysians. Government needs to provide an appropriate supportive infrastructure to ensure quality and effective access to education and training in general, and specifically to higher education in line with the proposed national lifelong learning blueprint.

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The NZQF and support for lifelong learning

Avril Keller

The national qualifications system

Under section 246A (1) of the Education Act 1989, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) is responsible for

  a. setting standards for qualifications in schools and in tertiary education;
  b. maintaining mechanisms for the recognition of learning (for example, the recognition of learning through qualifications gained and standards met);
  c. maintaining the qualifications framework and Directory of Assessment Standards;
  d. ensuring that secondary and tertiary education providers have assessment and moderation procedures that are fair, equitable, and consistent, and comply with the appropriate standards; and
  e. ensuring that post-school educational and vocational qualifications maintain international comparability.

The New Zealand qualifications framework (NZQF, see table 14.1) is designed to optimise the recognition of education achievement and its contribution to New Zealand's economic, social and cultural success. Specifically, the NZQF

  • describes the skills, knowledge and attributes a graduate has gained through completing a qualification;
  • prescribes level descriptors, qualification types and definitions;
  • requires the development of integrated and coherent qualifications;
  • enables and supports the provision of high-quality education pathways;
  • enhances confidence in the quality and internal comparability of New Zealand qualifications;
  • contributes to the strengthening of the Māori people by recognising and advancing Mātauranga Māori (Māori traditional knowledge); and
  • represents value for money, is sustainable and robust.

Level	NAMING SEQUENCE
10	Doctoral Degree
9	Master's Degrees
8	Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates, Bachelor Honours Degree
7	Bachelor's Degrees, Graduate Diplomas and Certificates
6	Diplomas
5	
4	Certificates
3	
2	
1	

Table 14.1. New Zealand Qualifications Framework. Source: NZQF, 2011.

Dimension	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Knowledge	Basic general and/ or foundation knowledge	Basic factual and/ or operational knowledge of a field of work or study	Some operational and theoretical knowledge in a field of work or study	Broad operational and theoretical knowledge in a field of work or study	Broad operational or technical and theoretical knowledge within a specific field of work or study
Skills	Apply basic solutions to simple problems Apply basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Apply known solutions to familiar problems Apply standard processes relevant to the field of work or study	Select and apply from a range of known solutions to familiar problems Apply a range of standardprocesses relevant to the field of work or study	Select and apply solutions to familiar and sometimes unfamiliar problems Select and apply a range of standard and non-standard processes relevant to the field of work or study	Select and apply a range of solutions to familiar and sometimes unfamiliar problems Select and apply a range of standard and non-standard processes relevant to the field of work or study
Application [knowledge and skills]	Highly structured contexts Requiring some responsibility for own learning Interacting with others	General supervision Requiring some responsibility for own learning and performance Collaborating with others	Limited supervision Requiring major responsibility for own learning and performance Adapting own behaviour when interacting with others Contributing to group performance	Self-management of learning and performance under broad guidance Some responsibility for performance of others	Complete self-management of learning and performance within defined contexts Some responsibility for the management of learning and performance of others

Table 14.2 NZQF Level Descriptors, Source: NZQA, 2011, p. 6.

Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	Level 10
Specialised technical or theoretical knowledge with depth in a field of work or study	Specialised technical or theoretical knowledge with depth in one or more fields of work or study	Advanced technical and/or theoretical knowledge in a discipline or practice, involving a critical understanding of the underpinning key principles	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge, and a critical awareness of issues in a field of study or practice	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of study or professional practice
Analyse and generate solutions to familiar and unfamiliar problems

Select and apply a range of standard and non-standard processes relevant to the field of work or study | Analyse, generate solutions to unfamiliar and sometimes complex problems

Select, adapt and apply a range of processes relevant to the field of work or study | Analyse, generate solutions to complex and sometimes unpredictable problems

Evaluate and apply a range of processes relevant to the field of work or study | Develop and apply new skills and techniques to existing or emerging problems

Mastery of the field of study or practice to an advanced level | Critical reflection on existing knowledge or practice and the creation of new knowledge. |
| Complete self-management of learning and performance within dynamic contexts

Responsibility for leadership within dynamic contexts | Advanced generic skills and/or specialist knowledge and skills in a professional context or field of study | Developing identification with a profession and/or discipline through application of advanced generic skills and/or specialist knowledge and skills

Some responsibility for integrity of profession or discipline | Independent application of highly specialised knowledge and skills within a discipline or professional practice

Some responsibility for leadership within the profession or discipline | Sustained commitment to the professional integrity and to the development of new ideas or practices at the forefront of discipline or professional practice |

	Certificate 1	**Certificate 2**	**Certificate 3**	**Certificate 4**
Purpose	To qualify individuals with basic knowledge and skills for work, further learning and/or community involvement	To qualify individuals with introductory knowledge and skills for a field(s)/ areas of work or study	To qualify individuals with knowledge and skills for a specific role(s) within fields/areas of work and/or preparation for further study	To qualify individuals to work or study in broad or specialised field(s) / areas
Credits	A minimum of 40 credits at level 1 or above	A minimum of 40 credits at level 2 or above	A minimum of 40 credits at level 3 or above	A minimum of 40 credits at level 4 or above

	Diploma 7	**Bachelors 7**	**Graduate Certificate 7**	**Graduate Diploma 7**
Purpose	To qualify individuals with specialised and technical knowledge and skills within a professional context	To provide individuals with 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 of self- directed work and learning	To act primarily as a vehicle for degree graduates to pursue further study at an advanced undergraduate level	To act as a vehicle for degree graduates to pursue a significant body of study at an advanced undergraduate level
Credits	A minimum of 120 credits from level 5 or above, including at least 72 credits at level 7	A minimum of 360 credits from levels 5 to 7, including at least 72 credits at level 7	A minimum of 60 credits, including at least 40 credits at level 7 or above	A minimum of 120 credits, including at least 72 credits at level 7 or above

Table 14.3 Summary of Qualification Definitions – Levels 1–10, Source: NZQA 2011, p. 25.

Certificate 5	Diploma 5	Certificate 6	Diploma 6	Certificate 7
To qualify individuals with theoretical and/or technical knowledge and skills within an aspect(s) of a specific field of work or study	To qualify individuals with theoretical and/or technical knowledge and skills within a specific field of work or study	To qualify individuals with theoretical and/or technical knowledge and skills within an aspect(s) of a specialised / strategic context	To qualify individuals with theoretical and/or technical knowledge and skills in specialised / strategic contexts	To qualify individuals with specialised and technical knowledge and skills within an aspect(s) of a professional context
A minimum of 40 credits at level 5 or above	A minimum of 120 credits from level 4 or above, including at least 72 credits at level 5.	A minimum of 40 credits at level 6 or above	A minimum of 120 credits from level 5 or above, including at least 72 credits at level 6	A minimum of 40 credits at level 7 or above

Bachelor Honours 8	Postgraduate Certificate 8	Postgraduate Diploma 8	Master's 9	Doctoral 10
To recognise distinguished study at level 8	To extend and deepen an individual's knowledge and skills	To extend and deepen an individual's knowledge and skills by building on attainment in the principal subject(s) of the qualifying degree	To qualify individuals who apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for research, a pathway for further learning, professional practice and/or scholarship	To become an increasingly independent scholar who makes a substantial and original contribution to knowledge
A minimum of 120 credits at level 8, with a research component that represents at least 30 credits at that level	A minimum of 60 credits at level 8	A minimum of 120 credits from levels 7 and above, including at least 72 credits at level 8	At least 240 credits, except where it builds on 4 years prior study at Bachelor Degree level of above, in which case it can be fewer than 240, but no fewer than 120 credits. The Masters Degree must comprise a minimum of 40 credits at level 9 with the remainder at level 8	At least 360 credits.

The NZQF comprises ten levels of learning. Each level reflects the complexity of learning, with level 1 the least complex and level 10 the most complex. Every qualification is identified by its qualification type, its related learning outcomes and by the credit value for that level. There are ten types of qualifications, from level-1 certificates up to level-10 doctoral degrees (see Tables 14.1 and 14.2).

All qualifications listed in the NZQF contain outcome statements that describe the knowledge, skills and attributes of a graduate. All qualifications in the NZQF have a credit value that relates to the amount of learning required by the qualification. A credit is the equivalent of ten notional learning hours. In determining the amount of learning required by a qualification, a qualification developer estimates how long it would typically take a person to achieve the stated outcomes in the context specified and to demonstrate that achievement through assessment (Table 14.3).

Pathways for workplace-related learning and assessment

The New Zealand qualification framework integrates formal (deliberate and assessed through recognised tertiary education and training courses), informal (incidental and through life experience) and non-formal learning experiences (occurring on the job or through structured programmes but not leading to qualifications). Figure 14.4 shows the pathways through which learning used in the workplace can occur and can be assessed. The formal learning that is assessed on the job and leads to recognised qualifications is shaded in grey in the diagram (note: if assessment can occur for informal learning, it can also lead towards a qualification). The NZQF comprises all nationally endorsed and quality-assured qualifications. All qualifications listed on the NZQF contain outcome statements that are used by prospective employers and other tertiary education organisations (TEOs), and for comparing qualifications. Different learners will achieve the outcomes in different ways, so outcome statements indicate the minimum achievement expected of a graduate with that qualification. Each outcome statement must include the following information:

- *Graduate profiles,* which identify the expected learning outcomes of a qualification. This describes what a learner will know and understand and be able to do when they achieve the qualification.
- *Education pathways,* which identify further qualifications that a graduate might attain after completing this qualification. Where qualifications are stand-alone, and do not prepare graduates for further study, the outcome statement should make this clear.
- *Employment pathways* or contributions to the community that identify the areas in which a graduate may be qualified to work, or the contribution they may make to their community.

NZQA supports lifelong learning

NZQA supports lifelong learning through the administration of the NZQF. NZQA's work in developing and maintaining qualifications, along with quality assurance to deliver them, ensures qualifications are of high quality and relevant to New Zealand learners. The NZQF provides a foundation for lifelong learning policy because it enables flexibility in learning pathways.
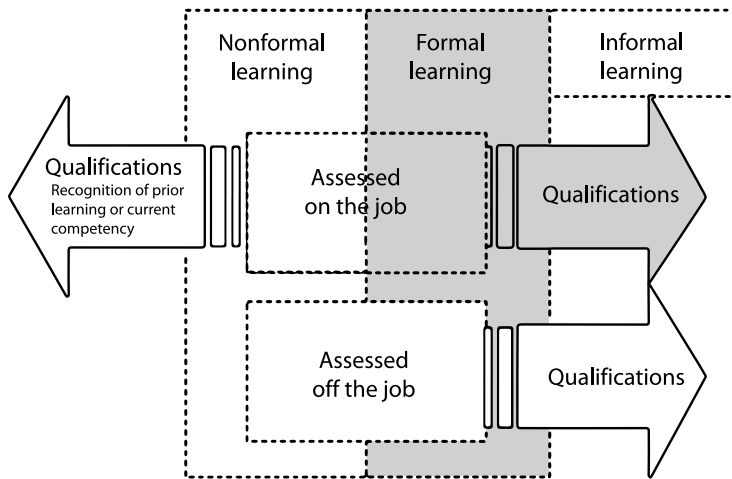
Figure 14.4 Pathways for workplace-related learning and assessment, Source: Vaughan and Cameron, 2009, p. 2.

NZQA has a policy that TEOs use (NZQA 2002). This policy states as a key outcome, "credit will be recorded for recorded success, whether or not it forms part or all of a complete qualification".

Education providers are required to adhere to the policy and have their own administrative and practical arrangements in place for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer. The credit recognition and transfer policy, therefore, relates to individual learners, employing organisations, industry and professional bodies, and educational organisations. This includes a number of institutes of technology and polytechnics in New Zealand that have been designated Centres for the Assessment of Prior Learning.

The policy calls for each education provider to have arrangements in place for the assessment of prior learning. Quality assurance then occurs in the assessment that leads to recognised qualifications.

Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer

Qualification developers must meet the listing requirements before NZQA will approve a new NZQF qualification. The purpose of the listing requirements is to ensure that the quality of qualifications. It also allows qualifications to be compared and people to make informed choices about which qualification pathway they may follow. The general listing requirements comprise six components: qualification definition; qualification type and level; outcome statement; credit value; subject area classification and qualification status.

The following overarching and operational principles apply across the education sectors for recognition of prior learning and credit transfer:

- The qualification, course and programme development and design should promote and facilitate credit recognition and transfer;

- The key focus of credit transfer decisions should be on the benefit for learners and on supporting effective learning pathways;
- The transparency in credit recognition and transfer decision-making across the education system is a critical factor in supporting and encouraging the ongoing involvement of learners in education and training;
- The credit transfer and recognition should operate across different cultures and national borders, and robust policies and procedures need to be in place to support;
- The credit award as a result of either recognition of prior learning or recognition of current competency is of equal standing to credit awarded through other forms of assessment and should be able to be carried by the learner once awarded.

RPL evaluates the skills and knowledge gained outside formal learning, from paid or unpaid work, from life experiences or from non-assessed courses or study undertaken. RPL involves the assessment and recognition of the unrecognised skills and knowledge an individual has achieved outside the formal education and training system. This assessment makes use of informal evidence of achievement.

A key element of RPL is the ability to make consistent judgements about qualification outcomes (Competency International, 2011). The NZQF focused on three approaches to consistency: setting RPL against which courses are developed, then assessing the achievement against criteria, and then moderating the assessment.

Recognition practices are inherent in the NZQF through the learning outcome statements. This flexibility in learner-centred education pathways allows for specific recognition practices to be determined by the provider in collaboration with the learner, as long as the overall policy of recognition is complied with and meets assessment requirements.

In practice, the assessment of prior learning is mainly applied to groups for entry to further education and training, or due to policy changes in professional qualifications. For example, when the qualification requirements for early childhood teachers changed, those without a tertiary qualification were able to be assessed against existing teaching competencies and experience. The costs of these activities are dependent on the level of assessment required and are met by the individual and the TEO involved. Some learners are assessed on the basis of attested prior performance, for example, using evidence from previous jobs. Others are assessed on the basis of a portfolio of evidence or demonstration of competences without completing a formal programme of learning.

The qualification outcome statement provides learners and prospective employers with an idea of what the qualification holder should have achieved. They describe what skills a learner can demonstrate, their understanding of the subject, and how they can apply the knowledge gained on completion of a qualification.

The education sector is driven by learner-centred initiatives. An outcomes-based framework allows for flexibility in learning pathways, and the portability of qualifications across education and employment jurisdictions.

Non-formal education

Non-formal learning (occurring on the job or through structured programmes but not leading to qualifications) or informal learning (incidental and through life experience) are pathways through which learning can occur and can be assessed and recognised on a national framework.

Recognition of existing competencies may lead to an increased willingness among employees to take part in workplace training or learning. In terms of the target audience, recognition encourages individuals who have not previously taken part in formal education. Depending on the workplace, or education environment, the RPL procedure may be determined for entry requirements by the provider, or validation purposes for employment skills.

Profiling, facilitation, assessment: Drawing on the candidates learning:

Recognition is carried out by: carefully interviewing potential candidates to find out the qualifications, or parts of qualifications, that best reflect the understandings that they have; taking a holistic approach to ensure that the whole of a candidate's understandings are explored and expressed; valuing the insights that each learner brings; providing expert facilitation to help draw out candidate's learning, and to enable them to understand the level of presentation they need to achieve.

Within *profiling* each candidate has an interview to discuss their experiences, understandings and goals. This is to ensure that the candidate is suitable for the RPL process and to help the candidate to select the qualification or part of a qualification that best reflects their learning from experience. With regard to *facilitation*, in this step, each candidate is supported to prepare for the assessment. Expert facilitators enable each candidate to express their understandings appropriately and to understand the requirements of the qualification. The facilitators take a holistic approach to ensure all of a candidate's understandings are valued, explored and expressed. Facilitation can be at a distance or face-to-face, on an individual basis or including group work. The kind of *assessment* depends upon the qualification sought. If the qualification is at Level 5 of the NZQF, then there is generally a panel of two or three expert assessors. If the qualification is at Level 6 or 7 (degree level), then there is a larger panel which comprises both academic staff and outside experts.

Outcomes of qualifications listed on the NZQF and learning outcomes of standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards are used to measure and validate the informal learning by expert facilitators. Validation in both the labour market and education system occurs through expert facilitators following a process of profiling, facilitation and assessment. Both the industry and education sectors follow the same governing policy for recognition.

The benefits of RPL

The impacts for learners of a qualifications framework that recognises prior learning are personally meaningful. It enables them to integrate their experience and gives them peer insights and support. It is of relevance to the learner's current career and provides increased confidence. Additionally, it provides an increased ability to contribute to the labour force.

The impacts for employers and organisations are that employees become more competent, confident, reflective, and analytical, better team members and have better communication skills. Employees experience on-site work-relevant learning and show higher motivation, with improved productivity.

The benefits of RPL for individuals include formal acknowledgement and certification of skills, improved access and equity in vocational education and training, the ability to identify skill deficits, and increased confidence, self-esteem and motivation.

The recognition and certification of non-formal and informal learning provides numerous opportunities on a policy level. These relate to areas such as skilled employment, education, equity and immigration. It makes visible the skills, knowledge and competencies of an individual. By promoting the individual's self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-concept, recognition may encourage individuals who have not previously taken part in the formal education system to do so. It also provides individuals with the evidence required to meet any entry standards for vocational or higher level education. Recognition of existing competencies may lead to an increased willingness by employees to take part in workplace training or learning.

Recognition procedures may motivate individuals to look upon learning not only in a lifelong sense, but also as a life-wide opportunity. It may also encourage the individual to embark on new learning experiences.

Challenges

Challenges include the lack of awareness and understanding of the RPL process, the costs, sometimes significant, associated with RPL, and the time taken to collect and collate evidence. As a result, potential applicants often prefer to take courses rather than go through the RPL process. The process can be off-putting for those who have had limited interaction with formal education, resulting in a lack of confidence. This is evident when applicants are unable to match their skills with competencies described in training documentation.

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EUROPE

The qualifications system and the national lifelong learning strategy

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Introduction

The main emphasis in validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic is not on upgrading one's qualifications (one level up) or on gaining access to higher education. Rather, it is on requalification and gaining additional, mainly vocational, qualifications. This is where most developments are taking place and where political emphasis is being placed. The system of recognition of non-formal and informal learning that is currently being implemented provides opportunities to those people who have no, or only very low qualifications to upgrade their qualifications.

In the main strategy document entitled *The Strategy of Lifelong Learning in the Czech Republic* (Ministry of Education 2007, p. 71), the first priority is to implement the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results.

The national qualifications system

The legislative framework for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic is laid down in the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results (Law 179/2006 Coll). The recognition of further education results was encoded in law on 1 September 2007. This law defines the conditions and the processes for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including full and partial qualifications. It also defines the term 'qualification' (full or partial) as well as the national qualifications register. According to this law, any person over 18 years old who has attained, as a minimum, basic education can request the assessment of their learning outcomes with a view to achieving a partial qualification. The process is based on an assessment by an authorised person (regulated by the same law) in line with the assessment standard for a given qualification, which is defined in the national qualifications register.

'Further education', 'learning results', 'initial education'

The term 'further education' in the above act means 'educational activities which are not considered to be initial education' and only applies to the acquisition of educational results included in the national qualifications framework (NQF) as full and/or partial qualifications, regardless of the manner of their attainment as specified by Act No. 179/2006 Coll. (Act No. 179/2006 Coll., chapter 1, Sec. 2.). However, this act does not apply to certain professions, such as lawyers and medical personnel, which have their own regulations.

'Learning results' are qualification requirements for performing an occupation and/or the achievement of an educational level, and they are specified in the NQF by the respective qualification and assessment standards. The 'acceptable paths to achievement' of a full and/or partial qualification are also specified in Sec. 1 (Subject and Scope of Application) of Act No. 179/2006 Coll: "The provisions of special legal regulations regulating education, the assessment and verification of results of education, professional training or conditions of qualifications, and the assessment and recognition of professional qualification and other

competences for starting up employment or self-employed regulated activities and their performance in the Czech Republic shall not be prejudiced by this Act." (Act No. 179/2006 Coll., chapter 1, Sec. 1.)

The Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results does not include the following learning results: learning results corresponding to all tertiary education levels (levels EQF 6–8); learning results of education and training preparing for regulated occupations and other regulated activities or performance forms, whether the respective education and training programmes are included in initial or further education within the formal educational system framework or provided separately by authorised providers operating beyond the formal education system.

However, learning results already gained by the age of normal conclusion of initial education (for youths and young adults of employment age) are also included in the process identified by the 'verification and recognition of further education results'.

For the purpose of this act, 'initial education' means pre-school education, basic education, secondary education, education at conservatories, and tertiary professional education carried out in accordance with a special regulation in nursery schools, basic schools, secondary schools, conservatories and tertiary professional schools, and studies carried out on accredited study programmes under a special legal regulation by universities and their faculties. 'Further education' means educational activities that are not considered to be initial education.

Czech lifelong learning strategies

Recognition and permeability are among the seven strategic goals of the Czech lifelong learning strategy. Other important goals are equal access, functional literacy, social partnership, stimulation of demand, quality and counselling. Formal (i.e., certified) recognition of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal settings depends on the political willingness to improve adults' employability. Non-formal learning activities need to develop a set of key competences that support learning for personal and social development. There is a specific emphasis on non-formal learning by children and young people as well as volunteers and people working in NGOs that organise non-formal learning.

The nature of lifelong learning policy includes frameworks for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In general, the sphere of further education and related recognition of non-formal education and informal learning has only become a priority in recent years. 'Further education' has become a subject of interest to several ministries, such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Local Development. Numerous activities have also been initiated by government offices and regional authorities.

The Czech Republic receives significant EU funding through the European Social Fund to support recognition of non-formal and informal learning, for which the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is responsible. However, when it comes to designing partial qualifications based on occupational profiles, other ministries contribute to the recognition process.

It is the task of the formal education and training sectors to design partial qualifications and assessment criteria, providing education and training, and requesting authorisation to undertake recognition of non-formal and informal learning for partial qualifications, and awarding full qualifications.

Private organisations may be authorised to deliver partial qualifications. Currently the majority of authorised persons are (private or public) schools, though some sectoral organisations (trade associations and chambers of commerce) and private enterprises have been authorised to assess and award partial qualifications. Some sectoral organisations have developed their own certification approaches (e.g., for accountancy or marketing). These often require professional experience in the sector as a prerequisite, and consequently they recognise the added value of informal and non-formal learning for professional development without necessarily specifying explicit standards for this recognition process.

From 2005 to 2008, two projects were run by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports aimed at developing and partially implementing a national qualifications framework in the Czech Republic: the NSK (which is the Czech NQF) project, and the national qualifications system (NQS: a development of NQF and UNIV) project. They were funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). Both projects significantly reinforced the role of social partners (especially employers) and their influence on the qualifications structure.

The role of the sector councils

Sector councils (SCs) were established to support the development of the NQF and the national occupations system (NSO). They enable close cooperation between employers and the education sector. SCs do not have a permanent status at the moment, but the intention of stakeholders is to make SCs permanent and sustainable.

Social partners in general (chambers of commerce, professional organisations, schools, representatives of universities) participate in the preparation of qualification and assessment standards. Sector councils currently focus primarily on the development of the NSO and the NQS. Right at the outset of the NSK project, sector councils monitored the labour market in certain industries, and identified new production trends and their effect on the development of the labour force.

The role of the government

The role of the government, in particular, of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, is to coordinate the activities of the central administrative authorities. It also issues the list of partial and complete qualifications and funds the national board for qualifications. Authorising bodies authorise individuals or legal entities once it has been verified that they meet the requirements stipulated by the law. They also monitor the fulfilment of requirements for assessment, collect data as set out in the law and submit them to the National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education (NUOV) for central record-keeping. They participate in the preparation and updating of qualifications and assessment standards.

Qualification standards for a partial qualification are approved, amended and repealed by the Ministry of Education, acting in agreement with the relevant authorising body. A draft qualification standard or its amendments are prepared by NUOV in cooperation with the

national board and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. It has to be submitted to the Ministry of Education for its approval. In so doing, NUOV cooperates with trade organisations, special interest and occupational associations, organisations of employers, professional societies, associations of legal entities carrying out activities of schools (as included in the Register of Schools and School Facilities), and representatives of higher education institutions. The approval, amendment and repeal of qualification standards is published in the official journal of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. NUOV publishes qualification standards by including them in a national register of qualifications.

The development of the qualifications register is linked to the reform of all vocational qualifications to improve the relationship between qualifications and the needs of the labour market. It takes place simultaneously with the development of a new register of occupations. The qualifications register contains full and partial qualifications. Partial qualifications can be related to full qualifications (i.e., full qualifications are composed of partial qualifications) but they can also be independent 'additional' qualifications. Full qualifications may be attained after successful passing a final examination, such as school-leaving examination or an examination on completing education at a conservatory). The examination is open to people who either have successfully completed the related formal education and training programme, or those who have acquired partial qualifications confirming all professional qualifications written in the national qualifications system for due performance of all working activities carried out within a certain profession.

The qualifications in the register are described through two sets of standards: the qualifications standard or certification standard which contains the list of professional competences; and the assessment standard which contains the assessment criteria and the assessment modes (such as oral explanation or practical demonstration) for each professional competence. These standards are used to recognise non-formal and informal learning as well as for the certification process which follows formal education and training programmes.

Recognition practices
Recognition practices include many approaches. The summative approach includes the link of recognition, validation and accreditation to a qualification framework. In the formative approach, recognition, validation and accreditation are linked to human resource management (mapping, notional levelling, and personal or career development planning process).
The procedure for recognition of non-formal and informal learning in the Czech Republic is closely related to the development of the qualifications framework. Law 179/2006 Coll., which defines the procedure for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, also defines the qualifications register that is the basis of the national qualifications framework.

There is currently no credit system in Czech vocational education and training. In higher education the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is not used for recognising non-formal and informal learning, although there are aspects of accumulation of learning outcomes in the previously described approach to recognition in vocational training. When a qualification is divided into several partial qualifications these can be accumulated, and may entitle the person to sit a final examination. However, typically a full qualification comprises only a few partial qualifications because the partial qualifications are expected to be

meaningful for the labour market in their own right. In general, the possibilities for accumulation are somewhat limited compared to a qualifications system which uses smaller units.

Non-formal education is predominantly organised by private organisations. One general rule has been applied since the middle of 2009: if a qualification is approved and published in the NQF, the organisation offering that qualification has to provide professional training to prepare trainees to fulfil the requirements of examinations.

The recognition system in the Czech Republic has a clear application procedure. The condition for taking an examination is to apply using a form published by the Ministry of Education and to pay a specified fee. An applicant sends the application form to any authorised person included in the national register of qualifications.

Assessment standard for a partial qualification

Assessment standards are derived from qualification standards and are approved, amended, or repealed by the Ministry of Education. NUOV, in cooperation with the national board for qualifications, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the relevant authorising body, prepare the draft assessment standard or its amendment and submit it to the ministry for its approval. In doing so, NUOV cooperates with trade chambers, interest and occupational associations, organisations of employers, professional societies, associations of legal entities included in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, and representatives of higher education institutions. Notes of approval, amendment and repeal of assessment standards are published by the NUOV in the national register of qualifications.

Assessing attained professional competence

Assessment of whether an individual has acquired relevant professional competence defined by a qualification standard for a relevant partial qualification is carried out through examination in accordance with assessment standards for the partial qualification concerned. An applicant taking an examination must be older than eighteen years, and have had at least basic education (the stage below upper secondary education). The condition for taking an examination is to apply using the form published by the Ministry of Education and to pay a specified fee. An authorised person or an examination panel of authorised persons assesses the attainment of professional competence. There is no special system of mentoring, counselling and assessing in the Czech Republic.

Impact and challenges

The ongoing reform of the educational system is too recent to be evaluated. One impact already visible is that the national qualifications framework (NQF) and systems of recognition were used in almost 1000 cases in 2009, even before it was widely publicized. Several groups, including employers, different ministries (with no special interest in education), associations, and trade unions, got involved in the process. This was revolutionary. However, at the same time the Czech Republic's system of recognition faced several challenges. There were challenges related to the implementation of a national lifelong learning strategy and to issues of cost-benefit, given the high expenses (over €11 million) incurred in building the system.

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The linkage between RVA-NQF and lifelong learning

Benedikte Maul Andersen and Kirsten Aagaard

Introduction

The Danish national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (NQF) consists of eight levels that together contain all publicly approved qualifications, including certificates and degrees from primary school up to university level. For each level there is a descriptor that describes the overall learning outcome that can be achieved at each level in terms of: 1) Knowledge, including types and complexity and understanding; 2) Skills, including types, task performance, and communication; 3) Competence, including flexibility, cooperation and responsibility. The aim of the levels and level descriptors is to make the learning outcome of qualifications more transparent, understandable and comparable, thereby promoting recognition of learning and lifelong learning.

The Danish NQF recognises three types of qualifications that cover all publicly approved education and adult education in Denmark: 1) Degrees in higher education, for example academy professional degrees, bachelor degrees and master-degrees; 2) certificates in primary school, upper secondary educations and vocational education and training; and 3) certificates for supplementary qualifications in adult education and continuing training, for example vocational training and single-course subjects in general adult education. Since 2010, degrees and certificates have been placed at one of the NQF's eight levels.

The development of the NQF has been carried out by an inter-ministerial working committee (2007–2009), which includes representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economy and Business, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), and the National Agency for Internationalisation of Education and Training. A permanent national coordination committee was established in 2009, comprising representatives of the four relevant ministries. This committee is responsible for implementation and further development of the NQF with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the Danish education and training system. In May 2011 the Danish NQF was referenced to the European qualification framework (EQF) and a report was published on the referencing of the NQF to EQF.

Denmark's strategy for lifelong learning

According to Denmark's national strategy for lifelong learning (Undervisningsministeriet 2007), the government's aim is to create better opportunities for individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences assessed and recognised within the adult education and continuing training system, regardless of where those knowledge, skills and competences were acquired. This promotes the participation of adults in education and continuing training, and increases their opportunities in the labour market. Legislation was enacted in 2007–2008 to increase recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training, ranging from general adult education to diploma level.

Since then, the Danish Ministry of Education has launched a several initiatives to raise awareness of prior learning assessment and to promote its use. These have included a partnership agreement with social partners, which ran from 1 August 2007 to 1 August 2009, and a national information and networking campaign. The national information and networking campaign produced an online skills portfolio (www.minkompetencemappe.dk) that can be used to document skills and a handbook of prior learning to be used by adult and continuing education institutions; established a national knowledge centre for validation of prior learning (NVR) and a Web portal to provide general information about prior learning (www.ug.dk); broadcast television adverts on Danish National TV; and organised conferences, seminars and meetings.

A number of policy initiatives have been undertaken with a focus on lifelong learning, with special attention given to people with few or no qualifications. These include a report compiled for the European Commission in April 2007, entitled *Denmark's Strategy for Lifelong Learning: Education and Lifelong Skills Upgrading for All*. This report states that the government's aim is to create better opportunities for individuals to have their knowledge, skills and competences assessed and recognised within the adult education and continuing training sectors, regardless of where and how they are acquired. It promotes participation in adult education and continuing training, and it intends to improve opportunities for adults in the labour market.

New rules for the recognition of prior learning
Denmark passed new rules relating to the development and recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the adult and continuing education system, which became effective on 1 August 2007.

The key legislation on validation of prior learning in Denmark is Act no. 556 of 6 June 2007, entitled 'Development of the recognition of prior learning in adult education and continuing training' (Udbygning af anerkendelse af realkompetence *på voksen-og efteruddannelsesområdet mv*).

The legislation gives each 18–25-year-old individual the right to have prior learning experiences validated in relation to specific goals of adult education and continuing training. It focuses on the needs of the individual, and aims to make the process as accessible and flexible as possible. A key aim is to motivate those with little or no education to participate in lifelong learning by making it easier for them to access recognition of prior learning.

The legislation for vocational education and training (VET) includes the assessment of an individual's competences as a basis for preparation of his/her personal education plans. (Undervisingsministeriet 2003). Based on an assessment of the trainee's competences, the personal education plan outlines an individual pathway through the VET system.

Since 2007, individuals can gain access to short-cycle and medium-cycle higher education (Bachelor-level degrees) based on an assessment of their competences. Validation leading to shortened education periods (exemptions from modules, etc.) is not possible in tertiary-level education in Denmark.

In 2010 and 2011 the Ministry of Education carried out an evaluation of Act no. 556 (EVA 2010), to estimate the effects and the quality of the law and to estimate the roles and

responsibility of the providers. The results were discussed by the Council for Adult Education and Training (*VEU-Rådet*) in June 2010 with the authorities and organisations that were involved in preparing the Act. From these consultations, the Ministry developed a new action plan to promote the validation of prior learning.

Funding

Recognition of non-formal and informal learning is financially supported by the Ministry of Education (EVA, 2010). The funding is through a system called the "taximeter system", which links one-off funding to institutions according to the number of RVA candidates completing competence assessments, personal study plans, training plans within specific institutions and courses of adult education and training. Preparatory Adult Education or courses included in the 'common competence description' in the adult vocational training system do not entail costs to the participant. Persons within adult vocational training (GVU and AMU) have the right to request the assessment of their competences.

Within general adult education a distinction is made between two situations: competence assessment for entry to programmes, which continues to be included in the taximeter system combined with a modest user fee; and competence assessment without entry to a programme (from August 2008), where the goal is issuing competence certificates and documentation. The latter involves no user fees, but taximeter funding.

The amount paid to an institution varies according to the type of study programme in which a person is enrolled. An activity such as individual competence assessment in relation to a particular education or training programme, or the preparation of a personal study plan, is also financed under the taximeter scheme. Every year the taximeter rates are set in the spending bill adopted by Parliament, based on estimated costs per student completion in each of several streams. Allowance schemes for forgone earnings during participation in education and training are based on a co-financed system through public and private sources. Private sources include funding by companies through a national fund set up by the social partners and through collective agreements. Co-financing is more or less a universal rule.

Within tertiary education, user fees for competence assessment are only applicable to persons with higher education level qualifications up to and including upper secondary level. The educational institutions receive a one-off taximeter payment if the competence assessment results in the programme being shortened by 15 per cent or more, or in the issuing of a certificate/diploma.

The public funding covers assessment at educational institutions. Public funding does not cover information, or clarification in the process with documentation of the individual´s application. Guidance institutions, enterprises and the voluntary organisations and agencies of civil society often deliver documentation for a formative and/or career development perspective.

Currently, validation activity is still relatively slow because the new regulations are still under implementation. However, activity is increasing within all fields of education.

Individual competency evaluation

Denmark has a long tradition of individual competence evaluation. In the past it focussed on individual skills identification for vocational training (1997), basic adult education (2001), and vocational education and training programmes (2003). However, starting in 2004, an increased focus was placed on recognition of prior learning (RPL). In August 2007 the educational fields covered by the legislation were expanded to include vocational training, single course subject in general adult education and general upper secondary education, basic adult education, vocational education and training, and tertiary degrees and diplomas.

The National Knowledge Centre for Validation of Prior Learning (NVR) was established in 2007, funded by a three-year grant from the Ministry of Education. The goal of the NVR is to collect, develop, and disseminate information about recognition of prior learning, with special focus on methods for documenting and assessing prior learning.

NQF linkage to lifelong learning

The NQF in Denmark promotes lifelong learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning in two ways: first, through the use of learning outcomes in qualifications, which provides an opportunity to validate and recognise outcomes from non-formal and informal settings in relation to the learning objectives of a given educational programme; and second, through the creation of a qualifications framework. In the qualifications framework, learning outcomes are used to describe levels and qualifications instead of curriculum or the length of an education, focussing on what an individual knows and is able to do. It is possible to gain qualifications in other ways than through education; for example, through working life, adult education, or civil society activities.

Recognition practices

According to Act no. 556, each adult education institution is responsible for recognition of prior learning. The institutions can assess and recognise prior learning using non-formal/informal experiences to meet the admission requirements, by tailoring an educational programme, by giving credit for certain classes up to masters level, by awarding a 'competence certificate' if the participant meets the requirements of part of an educational programme or an 'education certificate' if the participant's skills are the same as those obtained by completing an entire educational programme[5]. The certificates have the same value as certificates in formal education.

In higher education most validation of prior learning takes place at the diploma level. The qualification framework is used to assess for admission or for the award of competence certificates. A network is established between university colleges to ensure a common approach to validation.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning is based on references to the formal education and training system. In Denmark a competence assessment is always based on the educational objectives and admission requirements of the education programme in question.

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[5] Certificates of admission can be used for GVU, VVU and Diploma programmes. Certificates of competency can be issued for all six education areas, while certificates of education cannot be issued for general adult education and general upper secondary subjects at VUC.

The individual's competences should be recognised, irrespective of where and how they were acquired, but without compromising the quality of the education and training programmes. The methods used must ensure a reliable assessment, inspiring confidence in the outcome. Validation in Denmark happens only in the education system.

Summative recognition links RVA to a qualifications framework, while formative recognition links RVA to human resource management through mapping, notional levelling, personal or career development planning. The assessment of prior learning gives the individual the opportunity to qualify for entry to tailor-made educational programmes, or receive credit for certain courses, to obtain a 'skills certificate' for completing part of an educational programme, and to obtain a 'programme certificate' for completing an entire educational programme.

Table 16.1 shows uptake for 2008–2010, based on the numbers of pupils. This is still relatively low because regulations are still being implemented among educational providers. However, activity increased from 2008 to 2009 within all fields of education. Probably due to the financial crisis, a fall in activity was registered in 2010. The Danish Ministry of Education has recently set up a working group with representatives from social partners, practitioners, providers, trade unions and associations to discuss potential new initiatives to boost RVA.

	2008	2009	2010
Vocational training	195.4	296.9	262.9
Basic adult education	14.1	19.2	17.0
General upper secondary education	2.1	2.1	2.9
General adult education	0.37	0.37	0.7
VVU degrees and diploma degrees	–	58.0[b]	22.0

Table 16.1 Validation and recognition of prior learning (numbers of full-time equivalent student years).

a) A full-time student year is a measure used to calculate the annual activity of a certain course / certificate. One full-time student year equals one student in full-time training for one year. The training-period of individual competence evaluation within vocational training (IKV i AMU) varies between 0.5 and 5 days, i.e. between 0.0025 and 0.025 full-time student years. In 2010 there were 30,252 participants in 'IKV i AMU'.
b) On VVU degrees and diploma degrees the activity is made up in number of individuals. The number of persons who have qualified for a VVU programme or diploma is not recorded.

The role of social partners

In June 2007, the Ministry of Education entered into an agreement with the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), the Federation of Danish Employers (DA), the Confederation of Danish Professionals (FTF) and the Danish Association of Managers and Executives, to encourage greater use of adult and continuing education programmes geared towards the labour market, and to share information on new opportunities. In 2010 the National Council for Adult Education and continuing training (*VEU-Rådet*) had as its special focus the implementation of RPL. The focus of the government has been on the learning process and the processes of recognition.

Target groups in Denmark include low-skilled and unskilled workers or those with vocational qualifications that focus on practical skills. These workers are particularly vulnerable to outsourcing and automation.

So far, Danish non-formal education is not recognised by the national qualifications framework. The objectives of non-formal adult education are primarily to increase individuals' general and academic insights and skills, to enhance their ability and desire to take responsibility for their own life, and to enable them to play an active and engaged part in society. Denmark is developing a common system to describe competences in all areas, including non-formal adult education to support transparency and acceptance of documentation of prior learning.

In Danish educational institutions, assessment is always carried out in relation to standards of the education or training programme. The new NQF developed in 2010 is expected to increase reliability and enhance transparency, by promoting a common use of criteria and standards.

Tools, instruments and methods

Educational institutions are free to choose their own tools, instruments and methods. They should ensure that the methods used are appropriate, reliable and trustworthy. Examples of methods include portfolio, interview, demonstrations, tests and self-assessment. Different kinds of proof of prior learning may be submitted, as long as the assessment criteria correspond to the descriptions of the education aims and competence outcomes.

Impact

Denmark has not conducted systematic quantitative or qualitative analyses of data on the outcomes and impact of RPL. Knowledge is based on case studies, and limited to benefits related to learners' admission or shortening duration of education, and the general perception that RPL plays an important role in opening up job opportunities, improving employability and enhancing mobility within the labour market.

All stakeholders involved in recognition of prior learning have interest in a more sustainable practice. In the autumn of 2010, NVR, in association with The Centre for Development of Human Resources and Quality Management (SCKK), conducted a project on the professionalization of staff working in RPL, especially in education institutions. It can be counted as one of the most important initiatives for improving quality (SCKK 2010).

Challenges

The transition from system level to user level is challenging. It is difficult to convince particularly the training providers that recognition of prior learning is a good idea. Often learners and employers are not well informed about the right they have to get the validation of their non-formal and informal learning. It is necessary to adopt more bottom-up approaches to overcome some obstacles as described above.

The Ministry of Education needs to develop a better combination of formative and summative approaches. Furthermore, a wide-ranging public discussion about ways to connect the public and private sectors is needed.

Denmark needs to discuss in the future whether the Danish welfare model provides special opportunities for connecting the public and private, how to conduct dialogue with all relevant stakeholders, and whether the social partnership model supports the implementation of RPL.

The very limited data on outcomes and impact presents a major challenge. There is need for more statistics from all the participating educational sectors. This quantitative and qualitative knowledge is important for decisions relating to investments in RPL and its benefits for society, companies, and learners. It is necessary to look not only at economic outcomes but also to those relating to democracy and social inclusion.

It will be important to build a coherent and sustainable structure that will function in a flexible and practical way. Such a structure should be able to provide information about the possibilities available to the individual to make educational transitions by using RPL. It should also strengthen collaboration between the education sector, the labour market and the sector dealing with adult and community learning.

The Ministry of Education has compiled key recommendations on priorities, essential solutions and strategies towards recognising all learning. A key aim is to make RPL part of a strategy to facilitate movement from low-skilled to skilled work, and from skilled work to holding a VVU degree or diploma. Another key aim is to promote a system of guidance and counselling linked to RVA. Other recommendations relate to involving all relevant stakeholders, making RPL as legitimate as formal education, and increasing transparency and trustworthiness for everybody. The Ministry of Education has also highlighted the importance of promoting common standards, principles and methods, the professionalization of RPL practitioners, and making information directly available to target groups.

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An outline of the NQF development and the Recognition of Prior Learning

Carita Blomqvist and Saara Louko

Introduction

The Finnish national qualifications framework (NQF) was based on the government development plan for education and research for the period 2007–2012. The national framework is being prepared in accordance with recommendations pertaining to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

The clarity of the Finnish qualifications system, the learning outcomes approach and the competence requirements described in the legislation were good starting points for preparing the Finnish NQF. The flexible opportunities to progress through the education and qualifications system contribute positively towards implementation of the NQF.

The Finnish education system can be divided into three levels: general basic education; upper secondary education, covering general upper secondary education and vocational education and training (VET); and higher education, provided by polytechnics and universities. As a general rule, anyone who has completed studies at a lower level may pursue studies at a higher level. Legislation covering each particular form of education and training defines the objectives and the learning outcomes of qualifications.

The use of a learning-outcome-based approach is not new to the Finnish qualification system. Finnish VET has used a competence-based approach since the early 1990s. This approach has made it possible to integrate the validation of non-formal and informal learning into the existing formal VET system, allowing flexible access, progression and certification. Learning outcomes are also increasingly used to define qualifications in other parts of the education system, including higher education.

Preparation of the NQF

In August 2008, the Ministry of Education appointed a committee to prepare a national qualifications framework describing qualifications and other learning. Its tasks were to define the levels of the NQF in terms of knowledge, skills and competences; to determine the criteria according to which the qualifications are placed at different levels of the national and European qualifications frameworks; and to propose at which levels Finnish qualifications should be placed within the frameworks. In addition, the committee was asked to propose ways in which the national qualifications framework should be maintained, updated and developed, and to describe how quality will be assured. The committee also had to make proposals on whether the national framework could be extended to cover all learning in addition to formal qualifications.

The committee represented all important stakeholders: the Ministry of Education, the Finnish National Board of Education, Rectors' Councils, social partners (employer and employee organisations), student organisations (upper secondary and higher education levels), the Ministry of Justice, Defence Command, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities,

the Finnish Association for Vocational Adult Education and Training, vocational education providers in Finland, and the Finnish Adult Education Association.

The committee submitted its report, *National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning* (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 24), in 2009, a year after beginning their work. The proposed framework is designed to be compatible with both EQF and EHEA frameworks and has eight levels. The committee further proposed that the NQF be enshrined in an act of parliament.

In the autumn of 2009, the report was opened to public consultation in order to gather comments and feedback from stakeholders. Altogether, 86 written statements were received from various stakeholders. The consulting parties considered the committee's proposal as a good starting point for describing qualifications and other learning, and developing education with more focus on learning outcomes. All stakeholders regarded the preparation of a national framework for qualifications and other learning as justified, and considered it important to expand the framework to cover other learning (not leading to a qualification) as well. However, some pointed out that caution should be exercised when extending the NQF to other learning. The proposal for the Finnish NQF was presented to the Finnish parliament in the autumn of 2011.

A general description of the Finnish NQF

The proposal for a Finnish NQF aims to increase national and international transparency and comparability of qualifications. The aim is to improve the effectiveness and clarity of the qualifications system by describing Finnish qualifications and other competence modules in a coherent, understandable and comparable manner, while simultaneously harmonising the terminology used. Further objectives of the proposal are to increase the visibility of the Finnish qualifications system, thus facilitating international mobility from Finland to other countries and vice versa, to promote transition to further and supplementary education, and to enhance the validation and recognition of prior learning when moving within the qualifications system, thus supporting lifelong learning. A further key objective of the proposal is to pay greater attention to learning outcomes in qualifications, and to help educational institutions focus more on learning outcomes when developing their curricula and programmes. Clear and understandable descriptions of qualifications and other competences will provide a key premise for quality assessment.

According to the committee's proposal, the national qualifications framework, like the EQF, will consist of eight levels. The NQF describes the requirements for completing Finnish qualifications in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. However, the Finnish NQF does not distinguish between the different dimensions of learning outcomes; the aim being rather to create a holistic description for each level. Also, while the descriptors were based on the EQF level descriptions, they were further specified from a national perspective. In the NQF, the following dimensions of learning outcomes are described: knowledge, skills, responsibility, management, entrepreneurship, evaluation, and the key skills of lifelong learning.

For the time being, the Finnish NQF includes only qualifications that have been specified in the legislation. These are qualifications which the education authorities and other administrative sectors are responsible for.

In the proposal, the levels of the NQF are as follows:

- Completion of the basic education syllabus at level 3;
- The matriculation examination and completion of the upper secondary syllabus at level 4;
- Vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications at level 4; and specialist vocational qualifications at level 5;[6]
- University and polytechnic Bachelor's degrees at level 6;
- University and polytechnic Master's degrees at level 7; and
- Scientific and artistic postgraduate degrees, such as licentiate and doctoral degrees, at level 8.

The qualifications are placed in the NQF based on the best-fit principle. So even if a qualification includes elements from various requirement levels, the qualification is placed at the level which is most suitable for it. Qualifications of the same type are also at the same level in the national framework. However, as the VET qualifications are a rather heterogeneous group of qualifications, they form an exception to this rule. They have been placed at different levels: vocational upper secondary qualifications and further vocational qualifications at level 4, specialist vocational qualifications at level 5, and a handful of specialist qualifications at level 6, because it is viewed that these qualifications clearly and justifiably have higher requirements than other specialist qualifications.

As indicated by the name adopted for the framework (*National Framework for Qualifications and Other Learning*), the NQF will include other learning. 'Other learning' here refers to all knowledge, skills and competences; i.e., all prior learning. Primarily, prior learning will be incorporated into the qualifications that are covered by the NQF. That is to say that the recognised prior learning will form part of the formal qualification, rather than being placed in the framework as separate entities or qualifications. The main focus, when broadening the integration of RPL to the NQF, should be on courses that are not included in the national qualifications system, but are widely attended and provide learning outcomes defined by a competent authority.

Competence-based qualifications as an example of RPL

Competence-based qualifications were first introduced in 1994. Today, they are a well-established and concrete example of the recognition of prior learning in Finland. The idea behind such vocational qualifications is that that are no requirements to complete a certain amount

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[6] Notwithstanding, an individual vocational qualification which may be placed at a higher level in an exceptional case, if the qualification clearly and justifiably has higher requirements than other qualifications of the same type.

of study; instead, the candidates must meet certain requirements which are described in terms of learning outcomes.

The required competences, or learning outcomes, can be acquired in various ways: through formal, non-formal or informal learning (e.g., in working life); and the different learning methods can be combined to fit the candidate's needs. As part of this process, an individual plan for completing the qualification is drawn up for each candidate. This plan indicates the competence test that the candidate will have to take as part of the qualification or its modules. It also defines when, where and how the tests will be taken. Furthermore, the plan indicates if the candidate's vocational skills must be supplemented before the qualification can be obtained. Means of supplementing the existing skills may include, for instance, on-the-job training or participation in preparatory training.

The learning outcomes are recognised and validated by competence-based tests. The tests require the candidate to demonstrate required skills in authentic work assignments. The tests are assessed by training experts. Self-assessment by the candidates themselves is also part of the process.

The benefits of competence-based qualification lie in the individualisation of learning, which allows a greater number of students to complete qualifications, and in enhances co-operation between employers, workers, and education sector. The tests are open to everyone, regardless of age, work experience or educational background. From those who have broad and all-round professional competencies, preparatory training may not be required. Nevertheless, competence tests are mainly completed in connection with preparatory training.

Despite the increased possibility of making individual choices in the study plan and ways of learning, the competence-based qualifications belong to the system of formal education. So, although the means of gaining competence may be informal, the qualification itself is comparable and equal to the VET qualifications completed in traditional education and training.

There are three levels of competence-based qualifications: the upper secondary vocational qualifications indicate competence to enter employment in the field; the further vocational qualifications indicate the vocational skills required of skilled workers in the field; and the specialist vocational qualifications indicate a command of the most demanding tasks in the field. The competence-based qualifications provide eligibility to apply for further study at polytechnics or universities.

Responsibility for developing qualifications, quality assurance, and the actual provision of tests and training are divided among various actors. The Ministry of Education and Culture decides which qualifications belong to the national qualification structure; the Finnish National Board of Education sets the requirements for each competence-based qualification; the sector-specific qualification committees supervise the organisation of competence tests and issue the certificates; and the education providers that have signed agreements with the respective sector-specific qualification committees arrange the competence tests and provide preparatory training for the candidates.

Each qualification is overseen by a qualification committee. These committees consist of representatives of employers and employees, teachers, and, sometimes, entrepreneurs. The committees oversee the implementation of competence-based qualifications, ensure the consistent quality of qualifications, and issue the certificates to successful candidates. If necessary, certificates can also be awarded for individual modules; for instance if the candidate does not intend to complete the whole qualification.

Qualification certificates are awarded when all the required modules of the qualification have been completed. The qualification committee is the awarding body, as opposed to the training and test provider, and the qualification certificates are official documents. In addition, the Finnish National Board of Education recommends that together with the certificate an international certificate supplement should be issued to the candidates.

Conclusion

There are plans to include incorporating lifelong learning into the NQF. In recent years the recognition of prior learning has been a matter of intense discussion, and several working groups on different qualification levels promote this approach. Today, stakeholders have reached a broad consensus on the recognition of prior learning at the policy level. RPL is enabled in the national legislation for all levels of education.

Steps towards the implementation of RPL have been taken by further specifying the policies for each educational sector. National working groups for upper secondary and higher education are presently preparing policies and procedures for RPL in their respective levels of education. The national working group on the recognition of prior learning in higher education institutions has made recommendations on the devising of institution-specific recognition systems and the involvement of the Ministry of Education in this process.

Competence-based qualifications provide an encouraging example of RPL. The concept of recognising prior learning is a natural continuation of the national objective to encourage lifelong learning. The same objective is evident in the general structure of education, which ensures access to further study at all levels of education.

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The Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE)

Marie-Odile Paulet

Introduction

In France, qualifications reflect a person's operational ability to do a particular job. They are job-linked and appear in the job classifications found in collective agreements. Since 2002 France has made its certification processes more transparent and standardised by creating the National Directory of Professional Certifications (*Répertoire national des certifications professionnelles*). All diplomas or degrees must be listed in this Directory, including certifications created by ministries and professional titles created by all training bodies, whatever their level (secondary, higher education). Twenty years ago, professional bodies created a third group of certifications, the Certificates of Professional Qualification (*Certificats de qualification professionnelle*, or CQP), which describe the skills required by a profession but not the training content. CQPs must be registered in the directory. All of these qualifications are defined according to level, as shown below.

Level	Professional position
V	Staff employed in positions normally requiring a level of training equivalent to that of the Vocational Studies Diploma (*Brevet d'études professionnelles*, BEP) or the Professional Aptitude Certificate (*Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*, CAP), and by assimilation, the level-one Adult Vocational Training Certificate (*Certificat de formation professionnelle des adultes*, CFPA).
IV	Staff employed in supervisory positions or as highly skilled workers and with a level of training equivalent to that of the Professional Diploma (*Brevet professionnel*, BP), the Technical Diploma (*Brevet de technicien*, BT) of the professional or technological baccalaureate.
III	Staff employed in jobs that normally require degree-level training from university-level Institutes of Technology or a Higher Technical Diploma (*Brevet de technicien supérieur*, BTS) or have completed the first cycle of higher education (baccalaureate and additional two years of study).
II	Staff employed in jobs normally requiring training equivalent to Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts (BA) or a Master of Arts (MA) (baccalaureate and additional three to four years of study).
I	Staff employed in jobs normally requiring a level of education higher than the MA (baccalaureate and additional four years of study).

Two factors are forcing changes in the system: first, the application of the Bologna process, which is restructuring higher education to create an initial cycle of three years (instead of two), a postgraduate degree (Bachelor's plus Master's) corresponding to five years of studies (instead of four), and a third cycle leading to a doctorate; and second, the redefinition of the levels of study to make them consistent with the European Qualifications Framework. In the French system, any certification listed in the directory should be accessible through the validation of acquired experience.

Lifelong learning

In France a specific ministry, distinct from the Ministry of Education, is responsible for employment and vocational training. Furthermore, public policy concerning vocational training has been highly decentralised and is overseen – and funded – by the regions. Companies must allocate a training budget equivalent of at least 1.6 per cent of its payroll to training employees. They have to develop their activities (training plan), provide short-term professional training contracts for young people and jobseekers, and fund employees' training initiatives (individual training leave and individual training right).

The reform of vocational training began with the adoption of Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE) in the social modernisation law of 2002. It was consolidated in the law of 4 May 2004, thus ratifying the unanimous agreement of the social partners in 2003. It has been extended by further laws (including the Decentralisation Act of 2004) and many agreements between professional sectors or companies.

The 1971 law making continuing vocational training an independent area of labour law and the subsequent reforms in the state-led social partnership regulation, profoundly altered the French training system. In particular, it established the individual right to training and introduced new categories. It made it possible for employees to receive training outside working hours. It also gave the professional sectors an important role in this new system. The main aims of this reform were to put the employee in charge of his/her qualifications and competences. Rather than being employer-driven, it put the employee at the centre of all decisions regarding his/her own training paths and career progression routes. The reform of the vocational training system has meant that the professional sector has become the place where training policies are devised and implemented for employees. It sets guidelines for the development of training and the allocation of the corresponding funds in a largely open manner. As a result, there has been an increase in the use of professional training contracts. The system of professional training contracts has served to create on-going courses for employees and is designed to stabilise them in their jobs and to enable them to advance in their careers. The individual right to training is also becoming better known. All employees now have a capital of acquired rights. Validation of acquired experience (VAE) has been favourably received by public opinion. It allows many people to obtain an annual certification of their skills and acknowledges the formative nature of work (or of another activity). VAE is set to develop rapidly as problems identified in the certification process are resolved. VAE is fully integrated in businesses' overall skills management policies.

Nonetheless, access to lifelong learning remains unequal as training is provided to the best-educated and to employees with the highest responsibilities. Similarly, continuing education as it is currently organised does not address all the challenges of the knowledge society (the Lisbon strategy). Furthermore, the financial crisis has affected France since 2008 and calls for new measures to provide security of career paths. One of these measures is the Joint Fund for Career Security (Fonds paritaire de sécurisation des parcours professionnels, FPSPP), which came into effect through an agreement negotiated between social partners and the state in 2008, and was incorporated in the law of November 2009. Furthermore, workers who have been laid off keep the individual training rights they had acquired – the so-called 'portability' feature – which they can use either while unemployed or in their next job. This law is very recent, and it is difficult to predict the changes it will bring about.

Recognition practices

Some limited measures existed previously in France to recognise non-formal and informal learning. Social partners had been studying the possibility of VAE since the latter half of the 90s, committing to its development and negotiating its integration into the policies of professional sectors and businesses. The Social Modernisation Act of 2002 (Law No 2002-73, 17 January 2002 Chapter II) created VAE and declared the right of each individual to have their acquired experience assessed. Those experiences may be professional or personal, including skills acquired through volunteering, trade unionism and community activities. It was necessary that the person should have at least three years' experience related to the desired degree. This right is fully tied to the vocational certification system. Through VAE, individuals have access to certification in initial vocational training, higher education, universities and graduate schools, as well as to the certification specific to the continuing education of adults. Thus, VAE provides access to most certifications.

This process is known as 'accumulative' recognition. Training bodies had to gradually learn how to implement VAE. For secondary professional education, the Ministry of Education, which is the prime contractor, has organised implementation. In higher education and continuing training, each establishment or body has been responsible for defining the process and methodology. The work of researchers and experts has helped to establish quality processes and the government has created an inter-ministerial committee for the development of VAE to harmonise practices and documents. As a result, VAE has undergone significant development (see Table 18.1). Since the introduction of the system, 136,000 people have obtained certification through VAE.

Non-formal education

In France several types of operators organise non-formal education and short training leading to qualification or certification. The educational institutions under the certifying ministries provide continuing education services, for example in schools, universities and the graduate schools (*grandes écoles*, competitive-entrance higher education establishments). There are also about 12,000 active training bodies. The purpose of their activities is to provide basic education or second chance education for people who have received little formal education; to enable adults to attain, regain or develop employability; to create awareness of an innovation,

a new technology, or a new process; to update techniques and skills for professionals; and to provide new qualifications and even professional certification.

The validation of acquired experience (VAE) – five phases

Validation of acquired experience has been broken down into five phases. The first comprises consultation, information, and guidance. An applicant enters the second phase if their application conforms to the legal and administrative rules. Thirdly, a dossier of evidence is prepared, usually with the assistance of an advisor. In the fourth phase the VAE board evaluates the application. Finally, the VAE Board assess the candidate's claim and provides feedback on his/her future pathway. In cases where the Board instructs the candidate to further develop his/ her project and to complete the certification process, it will also monitor his/her progress. France allows two methods of documenting and verifying the acquired skills. The main method is declarative, usually by written application in which the candidate describes the activities he or she relates to the desired diploma/degree. The candidate must clearly state the acquired experience that these activities have enabled him or her to build up. The candidate attaches all documents that can demonstrate and prove this acquired experience: work certificates, examples of professional achievements, assorted attestations, and so on. The second, and less common, method is to present a real or simulated situation in which the candidate demonstrates his or her acquired experience by performing professional tasks.

The recognition of acquired experience puts the individual at the centre of the assessment process. The candidate goes in front of a board of examiners for an interview. The board of examiners is expected to "weigh" an individual's experience on the basis of standards and references of the profession and the required certification. The members of a board are expected to evaluate the skills and knowledge that candidates have obtained non-formally or informally and verify that they can demonstrate these, other than by academic examination.

In general, candidates are asked not merely to describe the work they have done but to explain how they acquired the skills and knowledge, and what results they obtained. By asking the candidate to analyse their own competences, their schemes of thinking, the models they use, their methodologies, the board can better understand whether the acquired experience is closely dependent on the context in which it was obtained or whether it is transferable to other situations. The objective of assessment is not only to award a qualification but to steer candidates' personal and professional progress, and to provide them with the tools to do that.

In the light of this assessment, the board awards the certification, rejects the application or grants it only partially. In the latter case, it must guide the candidate on how to build on his or her experience to attain full certification, including completion of additional training modules.

The effects of VAE

More generally, VAE is having an impact on programme design and pedagogical approaches. There is recognition that professional activities and practical skills are as important as knowledge acquisition and school-based learning. There is recognition of the fact that the activities of employees, freelancers, volunteers and union activists are enriching and rewarding.

	Number of admissible candidates					Number of candidates presented				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Ministry of Education (CAP to BTS)	19,136	20,818	23,148	25,594	28,692	19,136	21,379	22,284	21,967	22,013
Ministry of Higher Education and Research	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6909	4563	4146	3935	4529	4309
Ministry of Agriculture	930	828	839	799	961	263	351	365	371	446
Ministry of Social Action and Health	n/a	25,663	16,235	29,720	22,065	n/a	9219	10,400	16,111	13,899
Ministry of Employment	5200	7363	8855	10,178	10,659	4764	7426	9360	8983	8632
Ministry of Youth and Sport	3480	3025	2503	n/a	n/a	1535	1780	1407	n/a	n/a
Ministry of Defence	–	n/a	151	155	413	–	53	86	78	210
Ministry of Culture	–	–	1193	1201	1221	–	–	26	1108	1125
Ministry of Maritime Affairs	–	–	n/a	n/a	n/a	–	–	74	64	68
All certifying ministries	n/a	60,000-63,000	56,000-59,000	75,000-80,000	72,000-75,000	n/a	44,354	47,937	55,000 approx.	53,000 approx.

Table 18.1 Validation of Experiential Learning (VAE) candidates in the various certifying ministries, Source: Ministry of Education (Formation professionnelle au Projet de Loi de Finances pour 2010).

VAE is a key factor in recognising experience gained through work. It gives greater visibility to acquired knowledge and skills and encourages businesses to explain the skills they expect. It lays out more clearly career paths in the form of collectively guaranteed certifications, emphasising skills that are useful on the labour market. It improves workers' employability and encourages each person to continue learning throughout their life. Finally, it encourages mobility by recognising a pathway of progression. It is an essential factor in career security for all those who experience a change in a job, profession, or within trades.

VAE leads one to reconceptualise the education system, methods of certification, and the tendency to place abstract and practical knowledge in opposition to one another. Rather, personal and professional development both entail praxis and theory, which are in constant dialogue with each other. The system of transmitting knowledge and certification has for a long time been based solely on an academic logic. However, this logic is insufficient when designing programmes and methods that recognise professional activities and skills, and not only academic knowledge.

VAE also questions a French professional hierarchy that is very strongly based on degrees, and opens up the possibility of limiting the social and economic damage of dropping out of school, or failing, by taking into account acquired experience.

VAE is also a social issue for all those who have not had the opportunity or inclination to acquire a good school education, enabling them to acquire a qualification that is recognised in the labour market.

Challenges

The French education system faces many challenges today, particularly the massive increase in numbers in secondary education. The French system separates initial training and continuing education. The real implementation of 'lifelong learning', beyond mere rhetoric, requires a reconception of initial and continuing training as a continuum. This calls for a rethinking of its purpose, content, methods and organisation. One of the most important challenges is to create closer and more genuine links between schools, companies and services. Therefore, the school's fundamental role as a transmitter of knowledge is integrated with training that meets the needs of businesses and services so as to attain efficiency, competitiveness and development in the economy and society.

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Top-down and bottom-up approaches

Ruud Duvekot

National qualifications framework – top-down

The Dutch formal education system combines a unified education system, regulated by central laws, with a decentralised administration and management of schools. Non-formal education is either regulated by the authorities – when its learning outcomes are on par with national qualifications – or by social partners – when its learning outcomes are measured against sectoral standards or just within companies (Duvekot, 2010).

Formal education in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) is mainly geared to qualifications, enabling people to gain access to the labour market. Adult education (AE) aims at qualifications as well as empowerment and re-integration of target groups. Non-formal education aims at (sectoral) certification and employability. Continuing education and training is the domain of the social partners and is embedded in human resource development-policy of sectors and companies/organisations.

In the Netherlands, adult education, VET and HE standards are currently being formulated in terms of learning outcomes and competences. The use of the learning outcomes is limited to VET and HE (equivalents of EQF levels 1–7). In adult education, only informal assessment methods are used in guiding people to tailor-made learning opportunities. Adult education in the Netherlands is an educational process where adults try to gain a starting qualification in the labour market, improve their working skills or improve their daily lives. Mostly it is learner-centred and combined with the daily or work practice.

The Netherlands has started linking its National Qualifications System to the European Qualifications Framework. The working group established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences has set up a National Coordination Point for translating Dutch qualifications to the EQF. This means that the 14 Dutch levels (four VMBO; two HAVO-VWO; four MBO; four higher education) are measured against the eight EQF levels to give more transparency to the Dutch qualifications in the European learning arena (NLQF, 2010). The Dutch Qualification Framework (www.NLQF.nl) was formally 'opened' in October 2012.

The biggest challenge is to get real commitment from government and schools for linking Dutch qualifications to EQF levels. Another is to integrate the non-formal education system into the Dutch NQF. At the moment there is no strong linkage between the learning outcomes of formal and non-formal education.

Validation – bottom-up

The publication *De Fles is Half Vol!* ('The glass is half full!', which is the official policy statement of the government and the social partners on the Validation of Prior Learning in the Dutch context; published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs) was a first step towards lifelong learning using validation of prior learning (VPL; EVC or *erkenning van verworven competenties* in Dutch) (Werkgroep EVC, 2000). To support the application of VPL and to learn from existing practices, the government established the VPL Knowledge Centre (Kenniscentrum EVC) in 2001. Between 2005 and 2007 the Dutch government invested €40 million to

Individual	Stimulating self-investment in learning; showing learning outcomes; building up a learning biography or portfolio
Organisation	Building up competence management and facilitating employees' self-investment and articulation of competences; designing lifelong learning strategies in human resource management
VET/HE	Matching learning to real learning needs; offering learning-made-to-measure; focus on learning outcomes; facilitating lifelong learning strategies
Civil Society	Activating citizenship; transparency of learning outcomes in the civil society; linkages with other perspectives (qualification, careers)
Macro-level	Concerns policies of governments and social partners and their responsibilities for creating favourable conditions for lifelong learning through laws and regulations

Table 19.1 Objectives. Source: Duvekot et al., 2007.

develop a regional infrastructure and promote VPL at upper secondary and higher vocational education levels (Duvekot and Klarus, 2007).

There are no specific laws regarding the validation of non-formal and informal learning in the Netherlands. Validation is, rather, embedded in existing laws in the education sector. There is, however, an informal right of citizens without a formal qualification (equivalent of EQF-level 2) to obtain this level of qualification. He/she can enter any VET school and start a learning programme for this goal, with or without a formal VPL procedure.

Dutch educational institutions are being encouraged to develop and implement VPL. In the VET sector, nearly every regional training centre (ROC) now has a VPL service and is striving to improve the quality of this service. In higher education, universities of applied sciences (HBO) also implement VPL. Both private and public sector institutions can offer VPL if they are registered as a VPL provider with the EVC Knowledge Centre and adhere to the generally agreed quality code for EVC (Projectdirectie Leren and Werken, 2009). The autonomous universities decide for themselves how to use the results of VPL procedures. The government plays no part in this, but does ensure that the procedures meet quality assurance standards.

Legal framework
Concerning the Law on VET, in the classification scheme for developing standards in the qualification structure of Dutch VET, the purpose of qualification was explicitly stated: to facilitate recognition from elsewhere or previously acquired skills (informal or non-formal learning). This qualification structure provides a basis for assessing prior learning. It is important because it allows certificates to be provided from which social rights can be derived. It also prevents a distinction being made between the quality of skills acquired on the basis of a formal learning and skills acquired on the basis of a learning pathway independent assessment

(informal or non-formal learning). Both the results of formal and informal/non-formal prior learning are assessed through a system of independent assessment of learning pathways. Concerning the law on higher education, universities are left free to give access to their standards by means of a VPL procedure (WEB, 1996).

Stakeholders
The main stakeholders in Dutch VPL are: 1) the national authorities, which facilitate the development and implementation of VPL (law, finance); 2) the social partners, which encourage organisations to use VPL (through sectoral regulations and training funds); 3) the schools, which provide access to their standards through of VPL procedures; 4) companies/organisations, which guide their employees towards VPL; and 5) the citizens who can (with or without support from VPL providers) build up their personal portfolio for VPL procedures.

Stages in the process
A VPL procedure in the Netherlands normally occurs in the same stages:
   a. information and advice for the candidate, the employer or other organisations;
   b. intake of the individual and agreement on individual arrangements (the candidate makes the decision whether or not to start the VPL procedure);
   c. recognition of competences: building up a portfolio (supported by the coach);
   d. validation of competences (by the assessors); and
   e. the VPL report includes the description of results and accreditation (by the assessor).

The basic assumption is that accreditation is possible for a candidate with a suitable nationally recognised competency profile and is conducted properly and independently. Usually, a mix of methods is used in VPL procedures because every situation and every individual is different (Stoel and Wentzel, 2011).

Summative and formative paths for recognition and valuation of all learning
VPL has two main paths, a summative and a formative one. The summative approach aims at an overview of competences, recognition and valuation. Its goal is certification, where individuals seek this goal. When 'valuing learning' goes one step further and includes practical learning and/or personal competence-development, we call this the formative approach. This approach is pro-active and aims at designing a personal career and development path.

Both approaches are being developed and implemented with the assistance of innovative instruments and methodology. VPL recognises the fact that learning on the job or via other non-formal learning situations (learning through practical experience) can in principle deliver the same (professional) competences as learning within formal (classroom-based) situations. Recognition means awarding certificates or diplomas on the basis of a generally recognised standard, such as the qualification structure for professional education. Obviously there are also other standards relating to the labour market, which employers and employees regard as relevant. While external legitimacy is the key requirement for recognition, competences acquired elsewhere than in a working environment and/or used in other environments (such as voluntary work, private life) must also be recognised. VPL is not a goal in itself. It contributes to the desire

to develop individuals and to strengthen human capital management within companies. It is an important means for realising permanent labour market suitability and deployment potential.

For people already employed, skills can be developed which these individuals do not yet have, but which both they and their employers regard as necessary. In such cases, VPL acts as a reliable yardstick for determining which skills and qualifications the individual employee already has. Based on this inventory, a tailor-made training or development path is formulated.

Rational investment in training by companies and by society as a whole assumes an understanding of existing skills and qualifications, or the stock of skills and qualifications in the company, respectively. VPL procedures enable identifying existing skills and qualifications in order to determine the investments needed in training.

VPL procedures enable the visualisation of the profitability of training by expressing the results of training efforts in terms of its equivalent in national qualifications. When calculating the value of other economic production factors, the value of non-formal and informal skills and competences is linked to a common and reliable standard (or qualification).

The provision of flexible or customised training courses assumes that we can gauge a person's existing skills level. VPL can also improve the match between education and the labour market. This particularly applies in the case of skills-related training.

VPL is designed to assess non-formal and informal learning outcomes based on professional and/or social activities. The assessment provides valuable feedback on the content and methods of both formal learning paths and non-formal/informal work routines.

Transparency and guidance
Guidance aims at personal development, career-planning and facilitating flexibility and mobility of the individual learner in the labour market (Duvekot, 2009). Value is added by revitalising individual responsibility by:
1. providing the basis for goal-oriented development and career-planning;
2. stimulating personal development;
3. supporting self-managed learning and acting;
4. encouraging people to continuously document their professional and personal development.

The roles of the guider and of the assessor are vital in initiating personal development in any form. Guidance is a responsibility of any VPL provider in helping candidates to fill in their portfolio once a specific standard has been chosen. Providers receive training in how to guide candidates in a professional way through the procedure and give them advice on their opportunities.

VPL is highly developed as an online service in the Netherlands through portals which market VPL in an effective way by showing the broad potential of people's learning outcomes so far. This is done through self-assessments based on professional standards. The outcomes of these self-assessments give clues on which cognitive and which professional level people might reach if their prior learning were accredited.

Quantitative and qualitative effects and benefits

The yearly number of VPL procedures fluctuates between 6,000 and 15,000. Whereas in 2009 almost 16,000 procedures were performed, in 2012 the number was below 8,000. In general, one can state that about 80-85 per cent of these procedures are for user groups at VET levels (EQF-equivalents of levels 1–4) and 15 per cent for user groups at HBO level (HE; EQF-equivalents of levels 5–7). The VET user group used VPL to obtain a diploma at a VET level, to gain access to a VET standard or to gain access to and exemptions for a VET diploma programme. The HBO user group used VPL to gain access to and exemptions for a HBO diploma programme (Bachelor's level). The number of people applying for a qualification in the coming years – especially in the context of the financial crisis in a qualification that enhances employability gains in value – is expected to rise substantially for all economic sectors, but especially in education and healthcare. Concerning qualification levels, a rise is expected on all levels, but especially on the level of associate degrees (two-year cycle in HE) and in sectoral standards.

Challenges

The motivation of individuals to use VPL is the starting point for a more personalised lifelong learning approach. For VPL to realise its full potential, the following is necessary:

1. Collaboration between companies and educational establishments is essential to ensure that outcomes of work-based learning are recognised according to VPL procedures. Companies must provide guidance in workplace learning, and educational establishments must accept and value the workplace as a learning environment.
2. Employees need to be self-reliant in their personal development programmes following a VPL procedure. It is up to the individual to make choices concerning the degree of self-determination or external direction within the development programme.
3. A more customer-centred orientation of education institutions towards organisations and businesses is needed in order to help anchor VPL in human resource development. On the other hand, increased formulation of demands is needed from organisations/businesses in order to help anchor VPL in the policy of educational institutions.
4. Organisations and companies must ensure clarity concerning the competences present within the organisation, and the required competences within the framework of the organisational aims. More research on the impact of VPL on national and sector levels is needed, among other things focusing on its economic, financial and social effects.

All-in-all, there must be greater integration of VPL into HR policy and practice. This integration would enhance employability and mobility, and increase voluntary participation in VPL. The development of a motivating personnel policy with VPL as a built-in tool can give a company a competitive advantage. However, experience shows that a company has to offer its personnel a great deal of freedom of choice in order to make VPL a success factor in employee 'throughflow'.

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Linking validation of prior learning to the formal system

Hanne Christensen

Introduction

Compulsory schooling in Norway lasts ten years, and children start school at the age of six. The system for primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of 'unified schooling' and aims to provide equal and adapted education for all on the basis of a single national curriculum, described in terms of learning outcomes.

All young people between the ages of 16 and 19 have a right to upper secondary education and training. Since 1976 Norway has had a unified upper secondary structure that includes both general and vocational studies, based on a national curriculum described in terms of learning outcomes. Education or training at upper secondary level lasts three or four years.

General studies lead to a general university admission certification. Vocational education and training mainly leads to a journeyman's or craft certificate, and includes a period of apprenticeship. Learners who have completed their vocational education may take a supplementary programme to achieve the general university admissions certification.

Liberal adult education

There is a strong tradition of popular enlightenment in Scandinavia, often based on N.F.S. Grundtvig's principles of lifewide and lifelong learning, and including adult education through correspondence courses and evening classes run by distance education institutions and study associations.

The Norwegian Association for Adult Learning (NAAL) is an umbrella organisation for adult learning NGOs (voluntary sector). NAAL members organise approximately 37,000 courses, with 490,000 participants annually, covering a broad range of themes on several levels. The activities are based on a humanistic approach to adult learning, and on a belief in the potential of the individual and in equal opportunities. The member associations of NAAL receive governmental grants, administered by Vox, the Norwegian agency for lifelong learning.

A national qualifications framework

At present, the Ministry of Education and Research is working to establish a national qualifications framework (NQF). This work is directly related to two European processes; the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Bologna process. The development of a comprehensive NQF has gone through several stages, starting with the development of specific frameworks for parts of the education system. In 2009, the description of learning outcomes in the higher education (HE) sector was completed. In 2011, a consultation proposal for lower education levels was sent out to all concerned Norwegian education stakeholders, requesting comments and suggestions for change. The Ministry of Education and Research has appointed a committee to work on referring the NQF to the EQF. The responses received through the consultation process formed an important backdrop to their work. The intention was to include all Norwegian public exams and degrees in the NQF by 31 December 2012.

So far the proposed NQF is closely linked to the formal education system, describing levels of competence that are normally acquired through formal schooling. Non-formal and informal learning only finds a place in the NQF through validation and recognition based on the standards/curricula of formal education.

The preliminary results of the consultation show concern that non-formal and informal learning should be accommodated into an NQF in its own right, without having to be recognised via the formal education system. Many stakeholders are especially interested in making visible the vast reservoir of experiential learning from working life, which today is mainly documented within sectoral recognition systems, but is not visible in the proposed NQF. This is also the case for non-formal and informal learning from study associations and NGOs, which are important stakeholders in adult learning in Norway. The future process of developing the NQF will have to take these issues into consideration.

Organisational aspects

The Education Act regulates primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education for all, including adults. The provision of education at primary and lower secondary school level is the responsibility of municipalities, and at upper secondary level it is the responsibility of counties. This also applies for adults.

The Ministry of Education and Research has regulatory responsibility for all levels of education in Norway from kindergarten upwards. Primary and secondary education, including formal adult education at these levels, is the responsibility of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

Vox has a particular responsibility for non-formal education and for improving the participation rate in adult learning, specifically with programmes focused on basic skills training. Vox also has special competence within the fields of adults' legal rights and validation of prior learning (VPL).

The responsibility for immigrant education has been transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. Under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, it is the National Institute for Lifelong Learning (Vox) that is active in RPL of immigrant competences, and works in co-operation with other relevant stakeholders.

In addition to activities and responsibilities governed by the formal education system, Vox works in close cooperation with NGOs and social partners to further adult learning in working life.

Lifelong learning in Norway – current policies and legislation

Lifelong learning has been on the political agenda in Norway for more than a decade and has developed gradually, through the gradual introduction of a lifelong learning policy package. This includes the following elements:

1. Rights-based basic education (13 years) for every individual, including adults;
2. The provision of 'bridges' between different types of education and training;
3. The statutory right to validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes;
4. Work to avoid dead ends in mainstream education and training;

5.   The statutory right to (unpaid) study leave for employees;
6.   Enhancing of systematic career guidance;
7.   The Introduction Act which guarantees the right and obligation to Norwegian language training and social studies for immigrants and refugees;
8.   General availability of a variety of further and continuing education and training opportunities; and
9.   Appropriate and adequate financing arrangements for education providers and beneficiaries, including companies and individual learners.

With regard to further developments, in the Norwegian Government's white paper on early intervention for lifelong learning – Report No. 16 (2006–2007) – the following points are emphasised:
1.   Strengthening basic education for adults and education outside the school system;
2.   Extending the statutory right to upper secondary education to more adult groups;
3.   Establishing strong provision of adult education in local communities nationwide;
4.   Improving education for adults from minority groups;
5.   Ensuring cooperation on education for jobseekers;
6.   Competence development in working life and for prison inmates.

Also worth mentioning is a white paper published in 2009 on lifelong learning. In a press release from the Ministry of Education and Research, 'job number one' is defined as counteracting the rising drop-out rate in secondary education. According to this white paper, the government will give particular priority to adults who lack basic skills and who have not completed upper secondary education, by monitoring the practical application of the right to receive training and by developing a flexible system that takes account of adults' need to combine education and training with work and family life. Also, adults should be better rewarded for the competences they have acquired in working life – i.e., the system for validating prior learning is to be promoted and strengthened.

Legislation
Competence reform (1999) was a result of the national wage negotiations between the state and social partners. The main objectives of the reform were to help meet the needs of individuals, society and the workplace in terms of skills and knowledge, and to give adults opportunities to acquire education and training to improve their qualifications.

As a result of the reform, adults were given a statutory right to primary and secondary education, which has to be adapted to their needs and situation. Another principal objective was establishing a national system for documenting and validating the non-formal and informal learning of adults, regardless of where these competencies were acquired, with legitimacy both in the workplace and in the education system. These principles are now anchored in legislation.

Adults without prior upper secondary education (VET included) have a statutory right to upper secondary education provided by county authorities. This education should be adapted to the individual's needs and life situation. These adults also have a statutory right to

have their prior informal and non-formal learning assessed within the national curricula and their approved competences documented by the county authorities. The assessment process may result in an exemption from parts of the training schedule and a shorter training period in preparation for a full exam.

Adults with more than five years of documented work experience may obtain a journeyman's or craft certificate through validation of their documents. If their documents are approved, representing the right kind of practice and for the demanded period of time, they may apply to sit final exams. Such candidates are not required to go through a formal education and training process, but they take the same final examination as apprentices, including theoretical and practical elements.

Adults without a general college and university admissions certification can apply for enrolment in higher education on the basis of documented prior learning. The applicant must be over 25 years of age.

Recognition practices
As mentioned previously, adults who have not completed upper secondary education have a statutory right to receive such education. Service centres where adults can have their experience and prior learning validated exist in all counties. The process may well lead to an upper secondary certificate. If the candidate's validated prior learning is assessed as sufficient for a partial certificate only, he or she has a right to access modular courses to achieve a full certificate. In this way, recognition practices can be said to be both formative and summative.

Validation of prior learning is an individual right, and it is the responsibility of the county authorities to realise this right and assure the quality of the process. Funding is delegated to the 19 counties, and regional centres provide information and guidance. They are also responsible for the quality of the validation process and for training assessors.

This work (at upper secondary level) is usually carried out in practice within the regional education system. Often, upper secondary schools also function as assessment centres. In order to give the same opportunity to jobseekers who want their competence validated, projects are initiated to improve co-operation between the education system and the Labour and Welfare Administration.

Social partners
Employers' bodies and trade unions are important stakeholders nationally and regionally, both in a drive to realise policy goals and in practice (e.g., by offering apprenticeships and other training schemes in enterprises locally, thus supporting adults in VET schemes).

Target groups
The benefits of validation have been recognised in a wide range of policy documents. Many adults have worked in a trade for years without much schooling and with no certificate. Experience so far shows that validation is often aimed at obtaining a journeyman's or craft certificate.

In addition to issues relating to economic development and a better-skilled workforce, and the personal development factor for the individual, it is interesting to focus on positive

side-effects for marginalised groups. For immigrants and refugees, identifying and validating competence from prior education and/or work experience can speed up inclusion and integration into society, and act against racism and discrimination. For senior workers, validation of non-formal and informal learning can contribute to enhancing their careers, both in content and in duration. Senior workers often possess long-term work experience but lack formal qualifications. There may also be health benefits from getting a job better suited to the individual's situation.

Non-formal education

In Norway, the two major environments for non-formal education and training are working life and liberal adult education (NGOs). There is a comprehensive provision of learning activities, targeted at achieving qualifications and career enhancement as well as personal development.

Surveys have shown that working life is the most important arena for learning, but that a systematic approach is often lacking, especially in small enterprises.

There is no qualifications framework for non-formal education, but various industries set their own standards in co-operation with the relevant ministries. Industry organisations co-operate closely with the VET education system.

Assessment methods

Upper secondary school level is the area where validation of prior learning is most often put to use, with good results. Assessment is related to the requirements of the national curricula, both in theoretical and vocational subjects, and results in documentation of the approved competences in a certificate called a competence proof. These methods are widely used:

- *Dialogue-based methods*: used in discussions between an assessor and the learner (one-to-one); often supported by computerised or manual tools; used in combination with portfolio assessment, self-assessment and testing.
- *Portfolio assessment:* based on written documentation, photos etc.; often used also to support a discussion after admission – to tailor the course to the individual according to their knowledge and skills.
- In vocational subjects, a combination of interviews and practice is used, both to chart the learner's background, training, work experience, language skills and objectives, and to observe his/her skills in practice. In this way, both the theoretical and the practical side of the trade are assessed. Vocational 'testing' provides adults with an opportunity to show what they can actually do in their own fields.

Linking validation to the formal education and training system

In most cases, validation of prior learning is linked to the formal education system (i.e., validation is geared to the requirements of the national curriculum, aimed at granting access to or a shortening of existing education/courses. Validation processes in Norway may be helped by the fact that national curricula have been outcome-based for many years; thus, thinking in terms of learning outcomes is well established in the education sector.

Since adults have a statutory right to primary and secondary education, and this education must be adapted to their needs and situation, a validation process is often recommended to make sure the applicant receives the provision tailored to his needs. During the development of the national system, the foundation was laid for a varied set of methods and tools for documentation and validation of competence and skills. These methods and tools were piloted widely. As mentioned above, county authorities are responsible for the quality and training of staff, carried out regionally at the assessment centres. There are annual courses and seminars for assessors, and also mentoring of inexperienced assessors. Normally, assessors have a job background from education or the trade in question (for VET), or both. Trained assessors are registered on regional lists in the assessment centres.

Working life

As for working life, a system for documentation is required. The Basic Agreement for 2006–2009 states that "The enterprise is requested to have a system for documentation of the individual employees' experience, courses and practice related to the conditions of work."

The new basic agreement for 2010–2013 continues this focus, stating that "It is important that the enterprise has a system for documenting the individual's experience, courses and practice related to the employment relationship." Documentation of competence is considered useful, but is often not implemented.

Small companies, in particular, struggle to implement competence development. In Norway, 83 per cent of enterprises have fewer than 20 employees, and allocating time and resources for competence development can meet with financial and organisational obstacles. One solution which seems to work well is for small enterprises to form learning clusters or networks.

Impact

A recently published survey shows that a large number of people use the opportunity to have their skills validated in relation to upper secondary education. The survey estimates that 62 per cent of all adults who were completing their upper secondary education (including VET) in 2006 and 2007 had undergone validation of their prior learning, and 81 per cent of these received formal recognition of their learning.

There are significant variations between the different fields of study. In vocational training, by far the largest group of adults chooses health and social studies. Within this field, 62 per cent of candidates had undergone validation, and between 84 and 92 per cent (depending on the level of study) received formal recognition of their learning, resulting in an exemption from parts of the training schedule.

In order to build an information record, it is the responsibility of the county authorities to register all adult candidates who have gone through a validation process at upper secondary level in a national, digital registration system.

In higher education, following an amendment to the act relating to universities and university colleges in 2001, adults without a general college and university admission certificate can apply for enrolment in higher education on the basis of documented prior learning. The applicant must be over 25 years of age. Approximately 5 per cent of all new students in higher

education are adults admitted on the basis of recognised formal, non-formal and informal learning. In 2007, 67 per cent of adults applying for enrolment on the basis of prior learning were admitted. This proportion varies significantly between different fields of study.

The act also allows for exemption from parts of a study programme on the basis of a validation of prior learning, but a very small number of students apply. This indicates that sufficient information has not yet reached the target group. Applications for enrolment and exemption based on validation of prior learning are assessed by the individual university or college.

There are no available statistics on the direct results of validation (showing new or better employment after a validation process), but a lot of individual success stories are known. Since upper secondary education is almost a minimum requirement for employment in Norway, validation and recognition of prior learning gives more adults the chance to obtain an upper secondary education and a certificate that is the key to employability and greater flexibility in the labour market.

Participants and employers who have been interviewed in surveys report that the effects of VPL are overwhelmingly positive. During the years 2000 to 2005, approximately 60,000 people underwent VPL at upper secondary level (80 per cent in vocational subjects). On the whole, candidates found that the assessment of non-formal and informal learning was a positive experience – around 80 per cent found the experience useful or very useful. Supervisors and assessors found that the documentation of non-formal and informal learning has a positive effect on candidates. However, the surveys also identified a major need for training of the staff involved in the process – around 96 per cent of supervisors and 85 per cent of assessors felt that they needed training in the future, particularly in relation to quality assurance.

The basic agreement between social partners puts validation firmly on the agenda and strengthens the focus on prior learning in working life. For employers it is an obvious advantage to gain a better overview of staff competence. As previously mentioned, however, this is not without challenges. In the municipalities, work is being done to map the competence of municipal staff with direct effects on staff wages. This emphasises the importance of prior learning in working life and gives it status and value. The opportunities, rights and benefits related to the validation process are promoted by various local and national stakeholders, including Vox, county authorities and trade unions.

Challenges

There are many challenges in increasing the uptake and improving the system for validation for the benefit of adults and the society as a whole. Awareness – making the opportunities better known – is perhaps the greatest challenge. Opportunities for validation are not widely known, particularly among people with low formal education. The fact that only 26 per cent of employees are sufficiently informed about their rights and opportunities calls for a more targeted information strategy.

Also, the co-operation between the Labour and Welfare Administration and the county centres responsible for the recognition of learning at upper secondary level is underdeveloped – relatively few unemployed people use the opportunities to have their learning validated.

There is a need, especially in the voluntary sector, for more structured and reliable documentation. The documentation in this sector is weak and gives too little description of content, considering that the voluntary sector is a major stakeholder and an important provider of adult learning in Norway.

In working life, a major challenge is for employers to be aware of the principles of the basic agreement requiring them to provide better documentation for employees to progress in work and education.

In the education sector, the main challenge is the development of better and more uniform procedures. Local authorities in municipalities and counties, and also higher education institutions, meet their obligations in different ways. This means learners' opportunities can vary depending on where they live or study. It is vital to ensure equal treatment for everybody and to implement a universal understanding and interpretation of legislation and regulations.

A Vox report in 2010 points out a need to improve co-operation between and within the different sectors at county level, and between different levels of the education and training system. There is also a need to improve transitions between education levels and between working life and education. Furthermore, quality assurance is important, and it is necessary to focus on quality systems. Vox is implementing a two-year project aiming to further examine these challenges and discuss possible measures.

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Formalising non-formal and informal learning

Maria do Carmo Gomes

Introduction

This chapter is a reflection on developments in formalising non-formal and informal learning at the national level from 1999 and in particular after 2005, when the New Opportunities Initiative (Iniciativa Novas Oportunidades in Portuguese) was adopted. Portugal is in a unique position compared to other developed countries, in terms of the level of qualifications of the national population. Due to a low commitment to education over many decades as a result of various factors, including over 40 years of a dictatorial regime that was opposed to universal access to education, the level of qualifications and schooling of Portuguese citizens is significantly lower than in most other European Union and OECD countries. The distribution of the Portuguese working population by levels of schooling is the polar opposite of the average situation in these countries (for example, in 2001 seventy-two per cent of the working population in Portugal had not attended secondary school as compared to an average of 25 per cent in the European Union). Rates of lifelong learning were also the lowest in the European Union, with only around 15,000 adults per year completing a training course in one of the areas of lifelong learning. As a result, there has been little effective change to Portugal's educational deficit (Melos, Matos and Silva, 2001). On the other hand, persistently high rates of early school leaving (around 40 per cent of secondary school pupils left school early throughout the 1990s until 2006) have resulted in a significant annual increase in the number of young people who enter the job market under-qualified (Melo, Matos and Silva 2001). As various authors have pointed out, these factors constituted a significant constraint on the competitiveness of the Portuguese economy, socio-cultural development and the well-being and quality of life for individuals (Ávila, 2008; Capucha, 2005; Capucha (coord.) et.al, 2009; Carneiro, 2007; Carneiro et al., 2007; Costa, 2003; Imaginário et al., 2002; Lopes and Suleman, 2000; Machado e Costa, 1998; Martins, 2005).

While access to education and democratisation of education received a major boost during the 1970s, but was limited to four years of schooling in most cases, it took almost a further 30 years before there was a new political momentum to combat the low level of schooling of Portuguese citizens, involving a new level of renewed objectives and strategies.

In the wake of several experimental measures implemented from 2000 onwards as a result of the debate on the European Union's Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2004), a favourable framework was created by 2004 enabling a significant advance to be made in public adult education and training policies. The success of this intervention depended upon use of previously tested models, while simultaneously anchored to the latest lifelong learning processes, such as the implementation of national qualifications systems and the adoption of national qualifications frameworks referenced to the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2004, 2008).

This paper aims to present and discuss the links between the New Opportunities Initiative, the creation and implementation of the National Qualifications System in Portugal,

and the recognition of prior learning mechanisms for adults with low levels of qualifications as a way of *formalising* non-formal and informal learning activities developed through life.

The New Opportunities Initiative: Change and ambition

The New Opportunities Initiative was defined in a political context that assumed the urgent need for intervention. It was presented in the Portuguese parliament at the end of 2005, with an intervention agenda for the period 2005–2010 (MTSS and ME 2005). The Initiative differs from previous adult education and training policies in several ways: first, it placed adult education and training policies, including a set of measures for implementing the National Qualifications System, at the highest governmental level, thus countering the traditionally marginal nature of this field of public intervention[7]. Secondly, the Initiative included an integrated perspective of intervention with complementarity of the actions adopted by the education and professional training sectors. Thirdly, the Initiative had a wide-ranging scope, through establishment of specific objectives, concrete strategies and ambitious quantifiable targets, together with the corresponding 'financial cover'. The key emblematic target will be recalled as a milestone in the history of education and training policies in Portugal: to qualify one million adults (around 20 per cent of the working population) over a five-year period (Carneiro (coord.) et al., 2011). Below we will have the opportunity to explore these three aspects in further detail.

The path chosen by the New Opportunities Initiative drew upon qualitative models of adult education and training (AET) that were already in effect from 2000–2005 (CIDEC, 2004). At the time three differentiated models existed, of distinct value and with distinct guidelines and goals.

The first model was aimed mostly at continuous professional training (the result of a long period of financial, institutional and pedagogical investment in professional training, supported by the European Social Fund, in the 1980s and 1990s) of students, preparing them to carry out specific tasks or assume a specific job position, with close connection to the business community. It also included training for younger workers to enable their qualified entry to the job market. This model was developed by public professional training operators, with recourse to private training bodies for some sections of the offer. This process was not associated to any form of scholastic certification or recognition.

The second model – almost the direct opposite of the first, and without any complementarity – was focused on intervention by state schools that replicated the services provided by evening classes (in terms of curricular organisation, pedagogical aspects, duration, programmes and the recruitment profile of teachers appropriate for the particular level of schooling to be made available during the day for young people,. This constituted a modality of recurrent education, with courses from primary school to secondary school. The programme was reformulated several times, to tailor it more effectively to its target group (adults) in terms of its curricular organisation, with the introduction of units and modules. In certain cases it is possible to find good examples of work with the adult population (Gomes, 2002, 2003, 2005), notwithstanding the pressure to replicate curricula used for young pupils, which tended to result in increased dropout. This is demonstrated by the data: in the academic years of 2006/2007, 2007/2008

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[7] See in this regard the texts by Rui Canário (2000), Licínio Lima (2005), Luís Imaginário and others (2002).

and 2008/2009[8], of the 125,869 enrolled students, only 30,497 completed the recurrent education courses – representing a completion rate of approximately 25 per cent.

The third model, which was only developed from 1999/2000, followed a path of experimentation and consolidation of approaches closer to andragogy (pedagogical practices and methodologies adapted to adults and the specific practices and dynamics of social intervention for adults). This model is based on mobilisation of individual work and evaluation instruments, contextualised education-training methodologies, and systems of action and implementation of integrated public policies. It was these characteristics that made the programme innovative and tailored to the different audience groups and agents. Nonetheless, its existence was fragile, and it was located at the margins of 'formal' systems. It remained experimental and far removed from the prevailing education and training canons, until it was subsumed into the New Opportunities Initiative. Up until then, it was developed by education and training agents that nurtured this unusual approach, as part of an adult education and training system that was only duly regulated and formalised seven years later.

The main interest in the recent experience in Portugal is to define which factors were involved in this process of institutionalisation of adult education within the *mainstream* of the education and training system; namely those related to the recognition of prior learning.

The more innovative dimension: Recognition, validation and certification of competences
With the experience developed in basic-level AET courses, it quickly became obvious that many of the students in these courses already had competences that enabled them to validate all the Competence Units within the Key Competences Reference Frameworks (Alonso et al., 2001, 2002; Gomes, 2006a, b) and should therefore receive a certification that would have the same value as the training to be undertaken. Even if some students required a small number of complementary training hours, this did not need to constitute a complete module within the traditional curricular structure. Rather, the emphasis in the AET courses was on competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. This enabled construction of the National System of Competences Recognition, Validation and Certification ('RVCC System'), which is anchored in a very small number of specialised centres (Leitão (coord.) et al., 2002).

At the time, the Lisbon Strategy, highlighting the importance of lifelong learning, provided the perfect motto for implementing mechanisms for recognising competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings. The first six RVCC centres were organised by different institutional bodies: a business association, a professional training centre for direct management of public employment services (Institute of Employment and Professional Training), a state school, a professional school, a local development association, and a management centre. These were the first specialised units in the implementation of RVCC processes, enabling academic equivalence to be granted for years 4, 6 or 9 of formal schooling.

Today the network of RVCC Centres has evolved into a national network, incorporating over 450 New Opportunities Centres, while maintaining the institutional variety of organisational

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[8] The data for 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 were taken, respectively, from the Education Statistics 06/07 and 07/08, covering the public and private sectors. Information related to the 2008/2009 academic years was supplied by the Educational Planning and Statistics Office, as provisional data.

bodies (private and state schools, professional schools, professional training centres, local authorities, companies and business associations, regional and local development associations, and other training bodies) with a nuclear structure that specialises in implementation of RVCC processes.

Many other aspects of the transformation of RVCC Centres into a national network of new Opportunities Centres were defined. First and foremost, the initial diagnosis and forwarding stage (Almeida et al., 2008) were introduced. Then, new experts were incorporated within the teams, in particular for the guidance and orientation stages. New concepts and procedures, such as partial certification, professional certification or dual certification also began to be developed. New regulation and self-evaluation instruments were conceived and implemented, such as the Quality Charter of the New Opportunities Centres (Gomes and Simões, 2007) and the self-evaluation model based on the CAF (common assessment framework). New financing models were established and new technical and methodological guidelines were developed and disseminated. Finally, an administrative management and information system for adult qualification procedures was designed and developed. This is now used by all RVCC Centres and training bodies, thus making it possible to obtain rigorous statistical information (SIGO), and enable detailed monitoring of the New Opportunities Initiative.

Adult education and training courses: The start of dual certification for adults
Adult education and training courses opened the path towards dual certification for adults, combining the following principles of action:
1. Adoption of a constructivist perspective of the learning processes for students and trainers;
2. Adoption of an open and flexible framework;
3. Application of a reference framework for key competences;
4. Modular organisation of adult education and training curricula;
5. Local construction of the curriculum;
6. Procedural, qualitative and guiding evaluation; and
7. Personal and social mediation (Leitão (coord.) et al., 2003, pp. 9-10).

For the first time in Portugal, the programme's curricular design was based on a guiding document, distributed across key competences – the key competences framework for adult education and training (Alonso et al., 2001, 2002) – and structured across Competences Units, that were modular and autonomously certifiable, as part of a Key Competences Notebook. This model made it possible to structure the training pathways leading to certification for years 4, 6 or 9 of schooling or schooling levels B1, B2 or B3, and was obligatorily complemented by professional training pathways, corresponding to level 1 or 2 of the National Qualifications Framework.
The key innovation introduced in these adult education training pathways was the possibility of positioning students in relation to their previous learning processes by triggering a competences recognition and validation mechanism. In this system, trainees were submitted to a previous process of recognition and validation of key competences that they had already acquired in non-formal and informal contexts. They could therefore position themselves in training pathways that comprised only the Competences Units (modules) that they still needed to acquire.

The curricular organisation and pedagogical strategies used were particularly well adapted to people with low school qualifications. These people simultaneously needed to acquire vocational/professional competences (Couceiro et al., 2002; Ávila, 2004) as well as key competences or life skills to enable them to solve daily-life problems – the latter being decisive for ensuring successful enrolment in an AET course (Quintas 2008).

Until 2007, these courses exclusively provided dual certification (as a result of a legal obligation) and incorporated passage to an integrated competences recognition and validation mechanism. In this manner, in addition to enabling dual certification, the adult education training model took into consideration the learning activities already undertaken by students over the course of their lives in a wide array of different contexts.

These innovative principles – extremely daring in the Portuguese context – constituted some of the main innovations to the existing educational and professional training system. In 2007–2008 these courses underwent major organisational evolution, with expansion of the offer to year 12 of schooling and its adoption as an alternative modality for recurrent education (Gomes and Rodrigues, 2007; Rodrigues, 2009). These changes aimed to achieve two key objectives. The first relates to the new role attributed to the New Opportunities Centres as 'gateways', responsible for guiding certain students – identified for this purpose – to comprehensive training pathways or forwarding other students – that have completed a partial certification pathway – to complementary competences recognition and validation pathways. The objective was to achieve more organised work, via partnership networks that would involve co-operation towards a single goal – qualification of each of the adults in a specific field. The second objective relates to the capacity to validate formal learning processes already carried out in secondary school education, given that many of the students applying to the New Opportunities Initiative had already attended secondary school with successful studies in specific years of schooling but had not concluded the educational cycle. In this case it made no sense to require that these students follow the same training pathway as those who had not even attended this level of education. This is the model that is currently in force.

The S@ber+ ('Know More') initiatives:
A step towards flexibility and modularisation of curricular components
After the system had gained a certain level of experience, a third complementary modality to the AET Courses and the RVCC Centres was set up, involving short-term training initiatives that could be mobilised in conjunction with competences recognition, in order to overcome specific competence gaps within the reference frameworks. The S@ber+ initiatives were developed as short-term training modules associated with the reference framework for key competences, that could be developed at the level of the RVCC Centres and the processes developed. In certain cases they could also be developed autonomously by training bodies who already worked with the adult population in social intervention projects, in particular in certain S@ber + clubs (Melo et al., 2002).

These short-term training initiatives can be viewed as precursors to modular training units based on key competences, at the service of RVCC and adult training processes, enabling greater flexibility of the training pathways developed, in particular the scholastic qualification pathways for the adult population.

Today there are modular training units within AET linked to the National Qualifications Catalogue. This ensures certification and future qualifications pathways within the National Qualifications Framework, also taking into account the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

The New Opportunities Initiative was devised and defined within this context. The experience accumulated outside the mainstream made a decisive contribution to ensuring that the New Opportunities Initiative could attain its full political and institutional reach in 2005. This was the most ambitious public intervention in adult education and training in Portugal's recent history (Guimarães, 2009; Mendonça and Carneiro, 2009; Rothes, 2009; Gomes 2009b, 2010; Capucha, 2010a, b).

From the New Opportunities Initiative to the National Qualifications System

The New Opportunities Initiative is based on the Decree- Law of 31 December 2007 regulating the National Qualifications System. This Law is a commitment to build an integrated and coherent adult education and training system in Portugal. The Law regulates the following components of the adult education and training system:

1. The New Opportunities Centres (Administrative Rule no. 370/2008), which added new functions and a new scale of intervention to the RVCC Centres;
2. AET Courses, including those at the secondary education level and Level 3 of qualification, and certified Modular Training units (Administrative Rule no. 230/2008);
3. The National Qualifications Catalogue (Ministerial Order no. 13456/2008 and Administrative Rule no. 781/2009), as the regulatory instrument of curricula and qualifications;
4. The National Qualifications Framework (Administrative Rule no. 782/2009);
5. The Individual Competences Notebook (Administrative Rule no. 475/2010);
6. Professional training courses that are not integrated within the Catalogue (Administrative Rule no. 474/2010);
7. The issuing of diplomas and certificates for adult education and training in relation to the National Qualifications System (Administrative Rule no. 612/2010).
8. A comprehensive legal basis for the entire adult education and training system that had been developed over the previous decade.

The overall structure of the National Qualifications System still appears somewhat diffuse, disaggregated and sub-divided. However, for the institutions that are responsible for the implementation of policies in this field, the existence of this wide-ranging and comprehensive framework helps Portugal to meet EU recommendations (European Commission 2004, 2008). Table 21.1 shows the composition of the National Qualifications System in relation to adult education and training.

Obviously, the existence of a regulatory legal framework does not resolve everything, but in the Portuguese case the New Opportunities Initiative has permitted the creation of a network of highly diversified training providers. These cover public and private sectors, the fields of education and training, modular training courses, and a set of mechanisms for the recognition of competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings. The New Opportunities

Modalities for adults' qualification (non-higher-education level)	Operators of the National Qualifications System	Curricular and normative Instruments	Instruments of technical and pedagogical regulation developed by the National Agency for Qualification
Competencies recognition, validation and certification processes of basic, secondary or professional (levels 1, 2 and 3)	State schools Private professional schools	National Qualifications Catalogue (including the key-competencies standards for adult education and training – basic and secondary levels)	Quality Charter of the New Opportunities Centres.
			Model of self-evaluation of the New Opportunities Centres
			National, regional and sectoral monitoring models and plans and training initiatives for the teams of the New Opportunities Centres and the other operators within the modalities of adult education and training
Adult education and training courses of basic, secondary or professional level (levels 1, 2 and 3)	Professional training centres with direct and participated management by the Institute of Employment and Professional Training I.P.	National Qualifications Framework	Technical and informational support system for operators of the National Qualifications System (set of technical guidelines and methodological documents produced)
			Information and management system of the educational and training offer (SIGO) for the modalities of adult education and training – monthly, quarterly, 6-monthly and annual monitoring reports
			Regulation models of the offer of modalities of adult education and training and planning mechanisms of the supply networks at the national, local and regional level
			National and international external evaluation systems and studies – Adults Axis and Young People's Axis
Certified modular training units (based on the training reference frameworks of the National Qualifications Catalogue)	Private accredited training bodies (e.g.: business associations, local and regional development associations, companies, local councils, training firms, etc.)	Individual Competencies Notebook	Pool of external evaluators of the RVCC system (and respective accreditation and evaluation models)
			Sectoral Councils for Qualification
			Protocols of cooperation with companies and other employment entities for qualification

Table 21.1 The National Qualifications System in Portugal. Source: Decree Law no. 396/2007.

Initiative represents a break with the past, with various repercussions at a wide array of different levels.

The National Qualifications System and New Opportunities Initiative enable a new approach to the field of adult education and training. The logic of approaching each individual on a singular basis was expanded and institutionalised, constructing a qualification pathway for each individual adapted to his or her capacities, expectations and motivations, involving the acquisition of new knowledge, attitudes and capacities. The new system has used complementary diagnosis and forwarding mechanisms, competences recognition, validation and certification mechanisms and training of variable duration – contextualised or structured in relation to each adult's prior learning process. The emphasis placed upon the singular characteristics of each person, while working in territorially demarcated networks at the local/regional level has provided a suitable response to the challenges associated with community intervention. It was also possible to build a large-scale response mechanism within the field of adult education and training, thus countering the low level of involvement in lifelong learning activities (INE, 2007; OECD, 2011).

In addition to these results and their underlying factors, there is also varied evidence, as seen above, of the various impacts of the Initiative (Valente, 2011; Lopes, 2011; Gomes, 2009a, b; Capucha, 2010a, b). At the level of competences, in the field of basic skills that deliver awareness and highlight practical knowledge, new topics have been learned (in particular in the areas of information and communications technologies and different forms of literacy). There are also highly significant meta-learning benefits (i.e., learning how to learn), in terms of frequency of involvement in education and training initiatives over students' lifetimes, and in terms of the development of so-called soft-skills (self-confidence, capacity for team working, attitude towards innovation and change, social status, and a sense of pride for the work carried out), which are increasingly important in the job market. Families have gained, not only through valorisation of the adults, but also through the example parents can give to children regarding the importance of schooling, or through their greater capacity to keep abreast of their children's studies. These aspects have had a major impact on family reading patterns and children's success at school (Salgado et al., 2011). The participation by adults in the New Opportunities Initiative seems to be breaking the cycle of academic exclusion.

Companies, which have made increasing investments in the Initiative, now have access to more confident and qualified workers, who are willing to learn. They form the basis for improving competitiveness and the foundation for wealth creation, which may be distributed across all employees, benefiting in particular those who have made the effort to increase their qualifications, and also the national economy as a whole. In addition, students also feel better prepared to face changes in the job market and recognise that they have widened the range of opportunities available to them.

Above all, the New Opportunities Initiative is making a difference in relation to one of Portugal's structural problems; namely access to and acquisition of both academic and professional qualifications –crucial for social participation and justice. (Guimaraes, 2012).

From the theoretical and methodological perspective, the Initiative is an open field of investigation, where hitherto contrasting paradigmatic perspectives conceive new modes of intervention, new levels of response and new working methodologies and structuring of

systems, without overlooking the specific characteristics of the field of adult education and training which may and should be safeguarded (e.g., the contextualisation of learning processes, diversification of educational paths, singularisation and individualisation of working methodologies, and the effects of scale). We may go so far as to say that these principles should be taken into account in other education and training systems that are far from achieving the same level of learning gains and satisfaction and quality evaluation indicators as those recorded in Portugal in terms of adults qualifications.

This is a relevant question, because given the development gaps, risks of low competitiveness and effects of the global economic crisis, it is necessary to respond by placing people and their capacities in their due context.

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LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The National System of Competence Standards (NSCS) and recognition

Sergio G. García-Bullé

Introduction

Mexico is the thirteenth-largest country in the world in terms of geographical area, the eleventh-largest in population size and is the fourteenth-largest economy in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank, 2012). It is one of the best performing OECD economies in terms of public deficit management with 3.5 per cent of GDP, compared to an almost 10 per cent average among OECD countries. In addition, after several years of decline, the Mexican economy is now improving its competitiveness. According to the 2012–13 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report, Mexico ranks 53th overall, an increase of five places from the previous year's position, and is the most improved Latin American economy. While economic productivity has been growing in the last two decades, the pace is lower compared to other emerging economies. The main indicators of Mexico's drop in productivity growth rankings are human capital, workforce training and education. Based on data from the World Economic Forum (Global Competitiveness Report, 2012–2013), Mexico's innovative potential is hampered by the low quality of education (100th) especially in math and science (124th), the low use of ICT (81st), and the low uptake by businesses of new technology to spur productivity improvements and innovation (75th). In order to strengthen and develop human capital for long-term growth, economic competitiveness and social progress, Mexico has developed a national system of competence standards (NSCS), linked to the developing Mexican qualifications framework (MQF).

The Mexican qualifications framework

The Mexican qualifications framework (MQF) has been developed by the General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation and Revalidation (Dirección General de Acreditación, Incorporación y Revalidación; DGAIR), within the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). The National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER) is participating in the development of the MQF specifically on issues related to the NSCS, and equivalencies with formal educational degrees. The MQF (see below) has ten levels, with a design similar to the European qualifications framework. Currently, competences are evaluated through the National System of Competency Standards (NSCS), including five levels of competence, which are linked to vocational qualifications, as well as technical and professional education.

The national competences standards and their linkages to the Mexican qualification framework are promoted and regulated by the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competences (CONOCER), which includes government officials, employers' and workers' representatives, as well as educators. According to Ministry of Education Agreement 286 (Acuerdo 286 de la SEP; issued on 30 October 2000), CONOCER certificates of labour competence are equivalent to full or partial formal programmes, at technical and/or professional levels of the national education system.

MQF level	Formal education	Level	NSCS levels	Description of competence characteristics
0	Basic education	Preschool	1	• Highly routinized and predictable activities • Work under instruction of supervisor
1		Primary		
2		Secondary	2	• Programmed, mostly routinized and predictable activities • Work under instruction of supervisor • Work in coordination with group of equals
3	Upper medium	Bachelor	Currently in operation	3	• Routinized as well as some unpredictable activities • Receives some instruction from supervisor • Supervises and gives orientation to subordinate workers
4		Professional technician		4	• Different programmed or routinized activities • Unpredictable activities • Receives general guidelines from supervisor • Gives specific instructions to subordinate workers • Takes responsibility for own and others' work results
5	Higher education	Superior technician		5	• Manages complex technical or professional activities • Gives general guidelines and specific instructions to subordinates • Takes responsibility for own and others' work results • Responsible for planning activities for a working group • Responsible for professional development of others
6		Professional licence	Proposed to be added	6	
7		Master		7	
8		Doctorate			

Table 22.1 Mexico National Qualification Framework. Source: General Directorate of Accreditation, Incorporation and Revalidation (Dirección General de Acreditación , Incorporación y Revalidación).

Additionally, on October 2012, the Ministry of Education announced the new Mexican Bank of Academic Credits, which allows certificates of competence from CONOCER, as well as from other recognized private and public training/certification centres, to be credited as part of formal education programs.
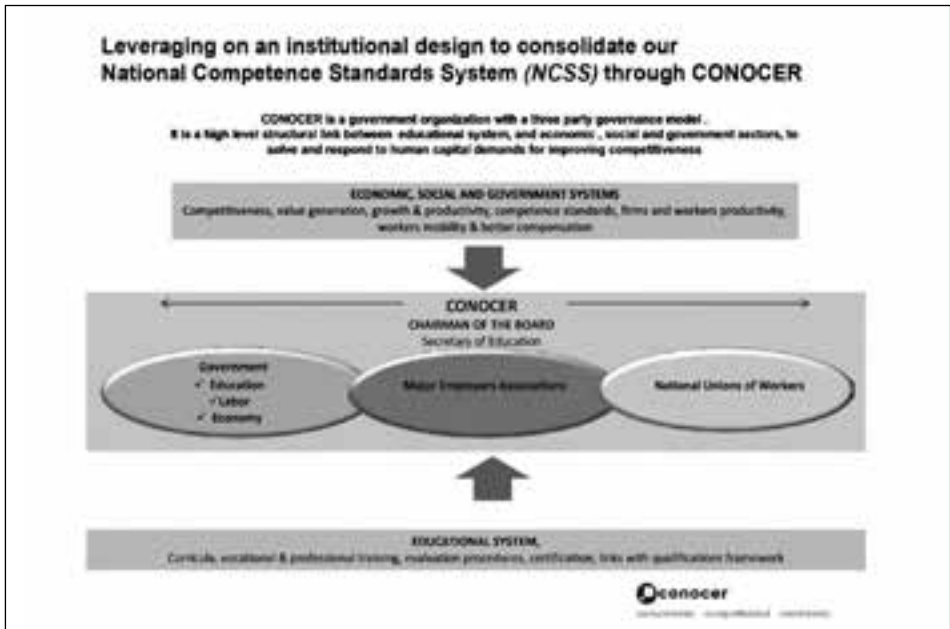
Figure 22.2 Leveraging an institutional design to consolidate the NSCS. Source: CONOCER.

CONOCER promotes the development of certifiable competence standards by employers and workers, assesses and validates unit standards, and issues official labour competence certificates. CONOCER bases the development of human capital on information about demand in the productive sectors, employers' and trade unions' perspectives on economic competitiveness, drivers that generate value, enterprise growth, local and international markets' presence, competence standards, and workers' productivity and mobility.

CONOCER also contributes to the improvement of curricula for vocational and professional training, assessment procedures and certification, and in this way builds bridges between the education, production and government sectors. Certification based on standards and qualifications conveys greater credibility to the market. In addition, CONOCER facilitates and contributes to labour mobility within the country or region through actions that link to national and regional qualifications frameworks.

National System of Competency Standards (NSCS)
The National System of Competency Standards (NSCS) is a strategic umbrella that was created by CONOCER under which recognition and accreditation practices are organised,

regulated and implemented. The recognition practices within NSCS are agreed by all stake-holders – employers, workers, educators and the government, and they ensure that Mexican society has competent workers in every productive and social activity, for economic growth, educational development, and social progress. The Mexican model is at this stage emphasizing standards of competence rather than qualifications. Certification according to the standards as defined by the production sectors is therefore considered a reference point and good proxy measurement for the social integration of labour.

The linkages between the NSCS and the qualification frameworks are based on six strategic principles:

a.   Combining actions of employers, workers, educators and government for economic competitiveness and growth;
b.   Involving all sector leaders in decision-making and agenda-setting;
c.   Fostering demand by reducing regulation and facilitating the operation of employers and workers within the system;
d.   Opening access to the private sector, self-employed workers, government workers, teachers and students requiring recognition and certification;
e.   Building consensus for educational curricula alignment, with demand requirements, through a National Register of Standards of Competence; and
f.   Promoting new paradigms for educators and supervisors, at school and at work; 'from trained to competent persons' and from assessment through traditional knowledge tests to assessment based on evidence of competence.
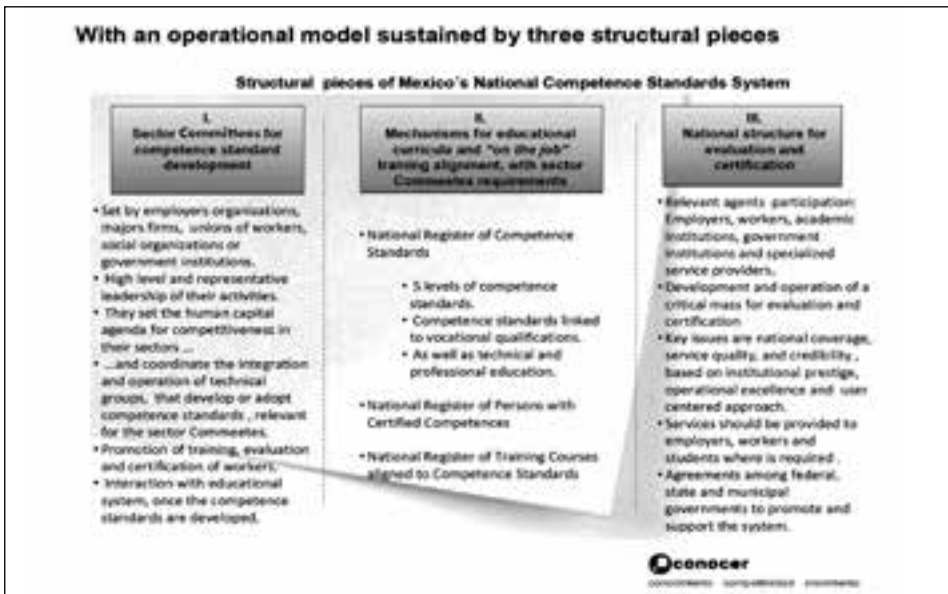
Figure 22.3 Structural pieces of Mexico's NSCS. Source: CONOCER.

The NSCS system involves the participation of employers, workers, educators and government. Employers and workers organise themselves into sectoral committees and develop the competence standards and qualifications relevant to their industries. The committees define the qualifications content, as well as the evaluation and certification entities allowed to provide certification, the time period for updating the competence standards, the time period for certification validity, and the initial point for registration of standards and qualification for official validity. The NSCS has approximately 80 sectoral committees, 60 of which belong to the private sector, ten to the voluntary sector (e.g., Red Cross, women's and children's protection), four are sport-related (both private and government sector), and six are government-sector committees for public servants' standards and qualifications.

The NSCS system receives partial financial support through a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which finances the development of specific sectors of the Mexican economy, such as automotive, construction, tourism, IT, logistics, mining, oil and gas, telecoms, power and electricity, and food processing. In addition, CONOCER receives government funding and internally generated resources to promote and develop qualifications for the social, voluntary, education and emerging economic sectors such as renewable energy, services for aging societies, Web-based educational services, agriculture for food production, aerospace, and housing.

Mexico's NSCS is sustained by three structural pillars (represented in Figure 22.3), namely the sector committees, the mechanisms for educational curricula and 'on-the-job' training alignment, and the national structure for evaluation and certification.

The sector committees for competence standard development

The sector committees for competence standard development are at the centre of the recognition practices model in Mexico. They coordinate the technical groups that develop competence standards relevant to the economic sector they represent, as well as promoting and executing training, evaluation and certification of workers. Once the competence standards are developed, the committees interact with the educational system, including students, teachers, workers and supervisors, for curricula adjustment and ad-hoc collaboration programmes. As of June 2013, Mexico has 127 of these sectoral committees (100 of which were set up during the last five years), representing 15 sectors of the economy and close to 65 per cent of Mexico's GDP. Their members include high-level executives, and representative leadership of the corresponding union of workers, employer's organisations, social organisations or government institutions.

Mechanisms for educational curricula and 'on-the-job' training alignment

Once a sectoral committee has developed a standard of competence relevant to its sector, the standards are submitted to CONOCER. If accepted, they are included in the National Register of Competence Standards and become a national reference for everyone who wants to develop such competences. Once a person is certified by CONOCER, his or her personal data is sent (with consent) to the National Register of Persons with Certified Competences. This is to ensure better linkages between firms and workers, for labour mobility and recruitment of certified persons. This register also represents a database of information on all

certified persons in the country. It is shared by employers, workers, educators and government offices for public policy development. This data facilitates follow-up of workers' and students' development and performance in the labour world, and tracks the economic and social impact of recognition and accreditation practices.

CONOCER has developed a National Register of Training Courses aligned to competency standards. This will provide information to employers and workers on available courses that comply with the corresponding competence standard. Only the courses approved by a sectoral committee may be registered and then become public through CONOCER.

The national structure for assessment and certification

CONOCER promotes the participation of relevant prestigious institutions in its assessment, validation and certification procedures, including employers', workers', academic and government institutions. This helps to develop a network of institutions and providers of assessment and certification services. This network of service providers assures national coverage, service quality, and credibility, based on institutional prestige, operational excellence and a user-centred approach. The network provides training, assessment and certification services to employers, workers, students, teachers, and public servants. In addition, CONOCER, as a federal government institution, signs agreements with state and municipal authorities to promote and support network development in their areas of influence. As of June 2013, Mexico has 120 evaluation and certification entities already in operation, with more than 3,000 points of contact across the country, responsible for recognition and accreditation of competences.

Recognition and accreditation practices

Recognition practices are linked to value generation and credibility for employers, workers, educators, and society in general. This involves recognising competences that are relevant to the competitiveness of a particular sector, conducting recognition and accreditation in a way that is credible for employers, providing labour mobility and access to better working conditions including better salaries for workers, and generating valuable information, allowing the educational system to align curricula with the requirements of the productive sectors.

CONOCER adopts a holistic approach to the development of competences. Its concept of competences includes:

1. **knowledge and abilities** required to execute a particular function in any service or manufacturing sector,
2. **social competences**, including the capability to build relationship of trust with others, working in teams and building social networks,
3. **attitudes,** including the ability to achieve goals, self-confidence, resilience, motivation and the strength to fight for one's beliefs;
4. **intellectual competences,** namely the capabilities to generate new ideas and innovation; and
5. **ethical competences**, including core values that help to distinguish between right and wrong.

So far, certification of competences is driven largely by a desire for economic competitiveness in certain industries, and mainly the personal decision of employers, trade unions, some academic institutions and individuals in certain industries. The motivation for adults to continue their learning is not the prime driver of certification of competences. In the case of voluntary work, certification of competences is often driven by compliance with legal requirements of government institutions, or civil organisations funded by government or international institutions. There are some specific programmes for disabled people, in the area of child care or women's protection, and for non-Spanish-speaking indigenous people to certify their competences, as well as those of social workers serving these sectors. For basic adult education there is a national programme managed by the National Institute for Adults Education (INEA), credited by CONOCER, to evaluate and certificate the labour competences of adults.

The recognition model of CONOCER is succeeding in Mexico thanks to official recognition and national validity, as well as collaboration between the three ministries of Education, Labour and Economic Affairs. The National Competence Standard System in Mexico, although promoted and regulated by government, is driven by employers and workers. The government has the role of evaluating, recognising and certifying students' competences for both vocational and professional education, and provides financial resources for the operation of CONOCER. Social partners (employers, trade unions, and the voluntary sector) participate in the design and development of competence standards through sectoral committees responsible of evaluating and certifying workers in their sectors. These standards are then utilised by the educational sector for curricula adjustments and validation.

Currently, in some international companies learners are involved in designing their own learning processes, and in recognition and validation. Overall, however, summative and formative models of assessment and recognition of previous competences have not yet been developed.

The Ministry of Public Education is currently identifying targets for formal training and recognition of non-formal education in some specific industries and areas of the country. The programme has identified 12 major sectors of Mexico's economy as targets, which are already being addressed by CONOCER. Employers and trade unions have a significant role in deciding upon this training, evaluating and certifying workers' competences within the NSCS framework;

Mechanisms for evaluation and certification

The mechanisms for assessment and certification of competences are based on portfolios of evidence, observations of real-life performances, interviews or proof of knowledge. When required, evaluation of attitudes, behaviour, and personal values are carried out through professional assessment tools. There is also a process to provide feedback from evaluations to positively impact a an employer's organisational success or an employee's career development.

A candidate, firm, trade union or institution who approaches an evaluation centre to go through evaluation and certification processes first of all receives a letter detailing rights, obligations and costs of the process. All candidates who decide to participate in the process are accepted for the evaluation and certification process. Legally there is no restriction for anyone who decides to start the process. Applicants may go through a voluntary diagnostic assessment to determine their level of competences. The applicant then decides if he/she

wants to go directly to the evaluation process, or improve his/her competence through a particular training programme or additional work experience. If he/ she feels ready then he/ she goes directly to the evaluation process and further certification. The cost depends on the market of service providers together with a fee to be paid to CONOCER (this depends on the level of the certificate; for example, for certificates at level 1 the fee is US$ 5; for level 2 US$ 15, and for level 3 US $30). Most of the processes are promoted and driven in an institutional way. The majority of the applicants are presented by trade unions, employers' associations, individual firms or educational institutions. Until now, few individuals approach the system for a single certification.

Feedback is important in this process. During the initial diagnostic, workers go through a test of knowledge, and receive feedback from the evaluators based in the results of the test. If they do not receive the certification, evaluators are obliged to provide feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the applicant, and the factors that were considered in not giving the certificate. Advice is also given in terms of what the applicant can do to improve his/her capabilities, knowledge and behaviour.

The CONOCER certification of competences is official and valid throughout Mexico, as it is issued by an entity that belongs to the Ministry of Public Education. In addition, equivalency with credits of formal education programmes at the vocational or professional levels is guaranteed through an agreement issued by the Secretary of Education (Acuerdo 286). Employers and trade unions, through their sectoral committees, also endorse the certifications, thereby providing validity and credibility to the labour market.

Impact

No impact evaluation has yet been conducted on productivity or economic and social progress for workers, but CONOCER is in the process of developing instruments and mechanisms to evaluate impact, such as building a database of firms, voluntary and educational institutions that certify workers, as well as of individual workers. The system currently contains close to 70 accredited entities for evaluation and certification of competences, with more than 2,000 points of contact to provide services around the country. Over the last five years CONOCER has issued 400,000 certificates of competence, 65 per cent more than during its first 12 years of operation. The increase in the number of competence certificates can be considered a good proxy measurement for the value that the market places on recognition practices. Apart from promoting continuous improvement of productivity and competitiveness of the labour force, CONOCER is a high-level structural link between the educational system, and economic, social and government sectors, responding to human capital demands.

CONOCER is well aware of how modern and ethical employers and workers' leaders feel about issues such as economic competitiveness, value generation, enterprise growth, local and international market presence, competence standards, worker productivity, mobility, and compensation, and social dialogue for decent work. At the same time the institution understands what the productive sectors of the Mexican economy demand from the educational system, and the need for better collaboration and integration between the education and productive sectors to improve and modernise curricula, vocational and professional training, evaluation procedures, certification, and links with national qualifications frameworks.

Currently there is a relevant and helpful agreement in place (Acuerdo 286 de la Secretaría de Educación Pública de Mexico), issued by the Secretary of Education, which allows for labour competence certification within the framework of the NSCS managed by CONOCER, to be equivalent at the technical and/or professional levels, to the national education system. This is of strategic and operational importance to CONOCER

Challenges

One of the main challenges for RVA in Mexico is to consolidate a credible system that contributes to economic growth and social progress. Issues of prime importance in creating an RVA system are: developing new modes of collaboration between the economic and educational sectors; establishing mechanisms for measuring the impact of the system on competitiveness, productivity, economic and social progress; improving competence standards, assessment and certification centres; increasing the coverage of all sectors - productive, voluntary, educational and government sectors; and maintaining the enthusiasm of employers and workers. Some of the social challenges concern poverty reduction and the need for new opportunities for poor people through the development and certification of competences; and support to Mexican migrant workers in the United States and Canada, through the recognition of their competences for better integration into the North American labour markets.

A final thought

Initiatives on recognition practices and linkages to qualification frameworks need to be driven by strategic issues of competitiveness for progress and prosperity, and not by operational issues of training, evaluation and certification, which, although critical for the implementation processes of the programme, are instruments and not purposes. The joint effort and the consensus of relevant and visible leaders is the single most important factor for success.

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Institution-based Recognition of Prior Learning

Lalita Ramlal-Chirkoot

Introduction

Trinidad and Tobago recognise the importance of education and training for its citizenry so that it can develop and sustain a harmonious social climate and culture, and support economic development and success. Like its Caribbean neighbours, Trinidad and Tobago aspire to the vision of the Ideal Caribbean Person as adopted by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Heads of Government. The basic tenet of the Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan of Trinidad and Tobago is to bring about 'the achievement of successful national development resulting in a high quality of life for all our citizens' by the year 2020 (Commonwealth Ministers 2011). The education system in Trinidad and Tobago should ideally "mould the kind of individual who possesses the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for active participation in life and underscore the role of education in enriching human experience. They go beyond competitiveness and give emphasis to the role of education in fulfilling human potential, preserving cultural values and promoting social cohesion" (Fazal Karim 2011a).

According to the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Fazal Karim 2011b), over the past two decades the post-secondary and tertiary education sector in Trinidad and Tobago has emerged from an initial stage of providing indigenous programmes at local public institutions to a more recent situation where foreign entities such as colleges, universities, technical-vocational institutions and professional bodies have become significant providers through franchise and other arrangements. This applies in particular to tertiary education. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET), on the other hand, is almost totally local. Rationalisation, expansion and integration of educational and training opportunities at all levels have now become necessary, given society's demand for education and training, including lifelong learning.

National qualifications system

Trinidad and Tobago has drafted its qualifications framework and is at the stage of developing an implementation plan. Whilst qualifications existed at the various levels of the framework for many years, it has only now been formalised, as the country aims at a seamless education system and ease of transfer of credits from one institution to another. The present qualifications framework applies to the tertiary sector and forms a seven-level qualification framework that spans both vocational and academic qualifications.

The various levels of the framework are defined by the breadth and range of competence or capacity, the complexity and difficulty of competence or subject matter studied, the requirements for specialised skills and activities, the ability to transfer competences across a broader range of contexts, the ability to innovate and to cope with non-routine activities, and the ability to plan and organise work and to supervise others. As a result, similar jobs are supported by similar qualifications.

Lifelong learning

There is no specific policy on lifelong learning in Trinidad and Tobago. However, the government's policy on tertiary education, technical-vocational education and training and lifelong learning identifies this area as critical to national development and ensuring international benchmarks (STTE, 2010.). Although the policy has not yet been implemented, ad hoc initiatives have been started by various tertiary providers, recognising that most citizens will change their careers several times during their lifetime, either by choice or circumstance. Learning within organisations occurs because those organisations restructure themselves, merge, change perspective, outsource and have access, through information and communication technology (ICT), to more international human resources, such that job descriptions, work arrangements, and work processes are constantly changing.

There is a strong link between primary, secondary and tertiary education and an integrative approach between the two existing education ministries in policy development. The intention is that interlinked commissions will ensure not only quality, but also harmonisation of the governance systems (STTE, 2010).

Recognition practices

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to the vision of creating a holistic, seamless system of education and training in Trinidad and Tobago – from early childhood care to primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary, and encompassing home-based, community-based and workplace education (Ministry of Education, 2004). This system is intended to increase educational and career opportunities for all citizens while simultaneously addressing human resource requirements emerging from continuous economic and technological change and the need to ensure present and further economic prosperity and social well-being.

The government steers the learning process by funding the various training institutions. Workforce surveys are conducted periodically to inform the training institutions of the needs of the country. Discussions have started between the government and institutions on the development of a coherent and seamless tertiary education and training system, comprising both public and private institutions. This will allow student mobility from secondary to post-secondary and tertiary levels, including mobility with technical and vocational education as well as to and from other areas.

Non-formal education

Some tertiary providers have only recently (within the past two years) begun to recognise prior learning and experience, and to award credit for these experiences. There are only two institutions, however, that have formalised their processes through institutional policies. So far, no national policy on the recognition of prior learning exists in this area, although there are national policies that pertain to broadening access to higher education. The recently established Accreditation Council has guided institutions to move curriculum to an outcomes-based structure (competency based curriculum), which now positions the institutions to evaluate competences based on learning outcomes.

All learning standards are set by the Accreditation Council. This quality assurance measure was introduced to allow for accountability and standardisation of learning outcomes (NIHERST, 2004). While, at the policy level, and according to the Ministry of Education (2008), there are no validated elements of learning outcomes, various institutions have identified their own profile of an ideal graduate, based on the government's Vision 2020 statement.

Recognition methods and tools

Within the institutions that do recognise some level of non-formal learning, portfolios and interviews are used as tools to measure, identify, document and validate competencies. Examples of proofs that can be submitted are job letters from employers, samples of work, and critical reflective statements. Acceptance of candidates for the procedure is at the stage of admission to the programme of study, after an initial interview is conducted, to determine the appropriateness of the case.

An assessor tests whether the learning competencies have been achieved. If 70 per cent of the competencies of a course are demonstrated through the various pieces of evidence presented, exemption is granted. Mentors are used to assist students as they develop the portfolio and to guide the information that is presented as evidence.

Impact and challenges

The institutions that recognise outcomes from non-formal learning also evaluate the impact of this type of learning on the educational progression and duration of study for adult learners. There has been a noticeable increase in adult enrolment at these institutions.

The major challenges faced by the institutions are getting employers to recognise non-formal and informal learning as credible. Because RVA is new to the Caribbean, and because of the traditionalist approach used in education for many years, there is severe resistance by many to adopting the principles of recognition of non-formal learning. Many tertiary institutions are also resisting the initiative. This is having implications for the integration of graduates into a permeable lifelong learning system. The introduction of effective systems of quality assurance and accreditation should ensure that the quality of learning achievements and academic outcomes based on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning meet or exceed internationally accepted standards.

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Linking Recognition Practices and National Qualifications Frameworks
International benchmarking of experiences and strategies on the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning

The concept of lifelong learning has become a vital component in developing and utilizing human potential and capabilities. Lifelong learning covers the full range of learning opportunities, from early childhood through school to higher and further education. Qualification systems across the globe are generally well equipped to deal with learning acquired in institutional settings. One of the greatest challenges, however, is how to recognise learning that occurs outside the formal education sector.

In this book, the recognition, validation and accreditation (RVA) of learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings is examined within a variety of national and regional contexts. It contains 23 country-specific reports on the linkages between national qualifications frameworks and the practices of RVA from all five UNESCO regions: Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Carribean. These reports are based on the outcomes of an international conference organised by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg in March 2010, entitled "Linking recognition practices to qualifications frameworks – North–South collaborative research". The conference explored how UNESCO Member States are promoting lifelong learning by establishing RVA policies and mechanisms, and asked what the challenges are in establishing linkages between RVA and NQFs

In reviewing the implementation of RVA, this book focuses on 5 key factors:
- national reference points for RVA;
- policy and legislation;
- the contribution of recognition to social inclusion;
- stakeholder involvement; and
- features of recognition processes.

The evidence presented here highlights not only the diversity of strategies applied internationally to manage the linkages between NQFs and RVA, but also the importance of RVA as an instrument for comparing different forms of learning and eliminating discrimination against those who acquire competences non-formally or informally.

The book will be of interest to students, policy-makers, practitioners and members of the general public concerned about lifelong learning.