GAMBIA

Introduced in 2006, the Gambian Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF) is a partial qualifications framework concerned with improving and standardising the attainment of occupational skills. As such, it is aimed primarily at Gambia's TVET sector (Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 4). The GSQF is also an integrated framework in the sense that it includes qualifications that can be attained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. In future the government intends to extend the GSQF into a comprehensive qualifications framework covering all education and training sectors.

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Gambia has a greatly limited productivity and employment outcome of the population. This is a result of its narrow economic base, its reduced internal market and low human capital levels. The majority of the population continues to work in subsistence agriculture. A significant proportion of young people works in rural areas and leaves school early. Many of those who do reach higher education choose to emigrate.

The main challenges in the TVET sector are: inadequate financing, the lack of tracer studies on labour market outcome, inadequate opportunities for access to training by youth, inadequate coverage in priority areas such as horticulture, and insufficient entrepreneurship training.

The GSQF has been specifically designed to address some of these challenges. The GSQF aims first and foremost to target young people, employees, the self-employed and people working in the informal economy, as well as the long term unemployed and illiterate people, both from urban and rural districts. GSQF will be a tool to help these target groups to graduate from public and private training providers and industry in as many occupations as possible with GSQF qualifications, and contribute to the economy of country.

Also, Gambia will utilise its existing potential to the fullest. It has key organizations like the National Training Authority (NTA) to spearhead reforms. Market analysis is being increasingly used to realise relevance of training. The Gambia Technical Training Institution (GTTI) is reputed for providing post-secondary Diploma and Certificate courses. Gambia also has a long tradition of skills provision, in particular, an extensive non-governmental and community based provision of TVET and a widespread system of informal apprenticeship.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the GSQF are to:

- address the challenges currently facing Gambia's education system and labour market;
- support human resource development across all economic sectors by setting out clearly defined skills standards to support vocational training;
- support learners whose literacy levels are functional but low.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The GSQF was developed with the active participation of a number of stakeholders including labour market stakeholders. The development process was led by the National Training Authority (NTA) in collaboration with governmental, non-governmental institutions, and the private sector (Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment 2010).

The National Training Authority Act 2002 mandated the NTA to regulate national vocational qualifications and coordinate the quality of TVET delivery, with the goal of making TVET relevant to all occupations and promoting lifelong learning for all Gambians (GSQF, 2006).

As part of its work to fulfil this mandate, the NTA has introduced occupational field Lead Bodies (LBs) and Standard Panels (SPs). The LBs drive the development of new qualifications, prioritising them according to economic demand. As well as allocating levels to each qualification and suggesting titles and types, they provide information about the suitability of qualifications for illiterate candidates and establish progression routes to jobs and higher level qualifications. Training providers who are responsible for skills training within their fields, such as employers from key enterprises, may be invited by the NTA to form a LB (GSQF, 2006, pp. 14-5).

The role of the SPs is to develop standards in the occupational fields concerned in consultation with a representative of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and at least one training provider. The qualifications are then validated by the LBs. The institutions involved in pilot SPs are 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 have also implemented mechanisms for the recognition and certification of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning.

A classification system detailing 13 Fields of Learning has been developed (GSQF, 2006, p.15). This system specifies the training fields for which training providers and/or assessment centres wish to be accredited. Trainers and assessors can also be accredited to train and assess learning outcomes in the different unit standards, making up a whole qualification in the framework.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The GSQF contains skills standards and qualifications organised according to four priority fields and several other Key Skills:

- Agriculture (Horticulture);
- Hospitality (Customer Care, Food Hygiene and Safety);
- Construction (Domestic House Wiring);
- Engineering (Motor Mechanic);
- Key Skills (Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, English Communication, Work skills and Life skills).

The GSQF is based on occupational competences and learning outcomes, both of which go to make up the skills standards against which assessment is conducted (Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 4). The GSQF focuses on competences irrespective of where they were gained, marking a break with traditional school-based TVET which focuses on input rather than output. Assessment is based on evidence of competences and outcomes of learning (Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 6).

The GSQF has four levels which are differentiated in terms of the difficulty of the tasks demanded and the degree of responsibility required. A summary of the GSQF level descriptors is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Gambia Skills Qualifications Framework (GSQF)

Qualifications		Level Descriptor
Level 4		Competent to perform managerial, analytical and/or specialist tasks associated with jobs that are non-routine, e.g. middle manager/professional worker
Level 3 Practical	Level 3	Competent to perform tasks associated with skilled jobs of a routine yet complex nature, sometimes with supervisory functions, e.g. team leader
Level 2 Practical	Level 2	Competent to perform routine and sometimes non-routine tasks under minimum guidance and supervision, e.g. skilled worker
Level 1 Practical	Level 1	Competent to perform a limited range of work activities under supervision, e.g. trained worker
Foundation level		Basic skills in English communication, life skills[1], numeracy and work skills, with literacy in mother tongue as an option

Source: Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 9.

The GSQF is adapted to the Gambian context where only half the workforce is literate. The Framework caters for this workforce in three ways:

- The foundation level acts as a stepping stone into entry level occupational qualifications for early school leavers, adults and trainees with a non-formal training background.
- Unit standards, particularly at levels 1 to 3, are assessed through practical demonstrations rather than written assignments.
- Skills standards include key skills such as numeracy, literacy, English communication and ICT skills, practical occupational and business skills, and life skills. These skills are considered critical for eradicating poverty and promoting economic growth in Gambia.

5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

The GSQF policy document recognizes the need for accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). This marks a real change against the traditional Gambian TVET school that was input-based. Instead a qualification is clearly focused on the assessment of learning outcomes, regardless of where they are acquired. However, quality assurance policy guidelines for assessment have yet to be developed. Although no standard mechanisms are yet in place for the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning, RPL is nevertheless taking place through assessments based on job performance and demonstration of occupational competences. The Adult and Non-formal Education Unit (ANFEU) of the Ministry of Education acknowledges the role of RPL in the context of the numerous adult and non-formal education programmes being implemented by NGOs and community organizations. RPL is considered particularly important for the following target groups:

- unemployed people seeking recognition for past work or achievement, either for entry into courses or for career development purposes;
- people who wish to 'upgrade' an existing qualification into a GSQ (e.g. by combining a previous certificate with work experience);
- people who have left a programme before completion, and who wish to count that learning towards another award;
- people with overseas qualifications who wish to gain a GSQ or credit towards one.

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[1] Life skills are an important component of key skills. The learning outcomes in the life skills units, as described in the GSQF (2006), include Health/Malaria/Personal Hygiene; Nutrition; Human Rights, Women's Rights, Child Rights; Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination; Care of the Environment; Civic Responsibility, and Access to Development Finance.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The government aspires to establish clear pathways between GSQF qualifications and other qualifications and courses within Gambia, West African countries, and countries of the European Union (EU).

A credit system has been built into the GSQF to help provide international comparability, e.g. for the purposes of entering overseas higher education courses. The GSQF document (2006) proposes a system of measuring educational achievement based on credits: " Credits allocated to a unit standard reflect the notional learning time it is expected to take candidates to meet the outcome performance requirements in the unit standards. Notional learning time includes: time spent in structured tuition; self-directed learning and practice; time taken to gather and provide evidence for assessment purposes; and time taken for assessment in all the outcomes and contexts of the unit standard" . One GSQF credit represents a notional 10 hours of learning (formal, non-formal or informal) assessed against the relevant unit standard (Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 11).

Gambia is one of the member states in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Descriptions provided for each qualification included in the GSQF as well as quality assurance in the assessment process permits legibility for another country in the ECOWAS sub-region. The Gambian approach permits the recognition of learning outcomes of the owner of the Gambian Qualifications. This will facilitate individual mobility. NTA is expected to develop benchmarks and references for vocational fields across ECOWAS member states.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The GSQF is an important step in the right direction. It has the potential to give many Gambians access to qualifications they would otherwise have been unable to gain.

The process of developing the GSQF has demonstrated the importance of tailoring a qualifications framework to the specific realities of the country concerned. The GSQF is designed with Gambia's low literacy levels in mind. Concepts are introduced orally with the aid of diagrams, symbols, pictures, flow charts and artefacts, so as to be accessible to illiterate trainees; outcomes are also assessed orally and through demonstrations.

Far from being an isolated piece of educational policy, the GSQF is embedded in other broader training policies and reform initiatives in Gambia, for example in the areas of adult literacy, apprenticeship policy, and national economic development projects. The government and concerned stakeholders recognize that training providers and employers need to take into account resource availability before setting standards and designing training programmes.

At present, the GSQF is aimed at only a few economic sectors and occupational fields. The next step would be to develop a comprehensive suite of internationally accepted qualifications accessible to and affordable by all Gambians, covering all economic sectors (Gambian National Training Authority, 2006, p. 6). Turning the GSQF into a comprehensive national qualifications framework is a major undertaking which would need to be planned and implemented incrementally.

Implementing a GSQF entails a paradigmatic shift that separates the training process from the certification process. This gives legibility to the content and value of the learning outcomes of the owner of a qualification. While quality training is important, qualifications are different because they focus on the meaning and value of learning outcomes after the training process.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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