

NAMIBIA

Introduced in 2006, the Namibian Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive and inclusive framework spanning all certification levels from school to university, including all forms of learning; formal, non-formal and informal. The NQF is intended to be a register of all official qualifications in Namibia, as well as being a crucial tool for promoting lifelong learning.

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Inequality in the education system inherited from the colonial regime was one of many major challenges confronting the new government that came to power in Namibia in 1990. Upon independence, large-scale educational reforms were undertaken with the aim of correcting the imbalances of the past and creating an inclusive, fair and learner-centred education system for the future. A policy directive was adopted entitled: 'Towards Education for All: A Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training' (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1992). This directive highlighted the four development goals of access, equality, quality and democracy, and gave special importance to lifelong learning as an organizing principle of Namibia's education sector. Other reforms included the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training of 1999 (Republic of Namibia, 1999) and the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) of 2005 (Republic of Namibia, 2005)

A key challenge that continues to confront the Namibian education and training system is the perception that learning attained via the conventional, formal route is superior to that attained in informal or non-formal settings, for example, open and distance learning (ODL), workplace-based learning, and learning acquired through general life experiences. The government and concerned stakeholders are committed to changing this perception, and have developed a national Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy for this purpose.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NQF aims to:

- introduce unity and consistency to the Namibian qualifications system by bringing all qualifications together under one umbrella;
- facilitate horizontal and vertical mobility throughout the education and training system;
- promote the consistent use of qualification titles;
- provide clear information about the knowledge and skills that can be expected of a qualification holder or an RPL learner, making it easier for both learners and employers to understand the similarities and differences between qualifications;
- harmonize the different education and training sectors and improve their alignment with the world of work;
- provide assurance of the quality of education, training and assessment in Namibia;
- enhance the reputation of Namibia's education and training system in the regional, continental and international communities (Namibia Qualifications Authority, 2011).

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

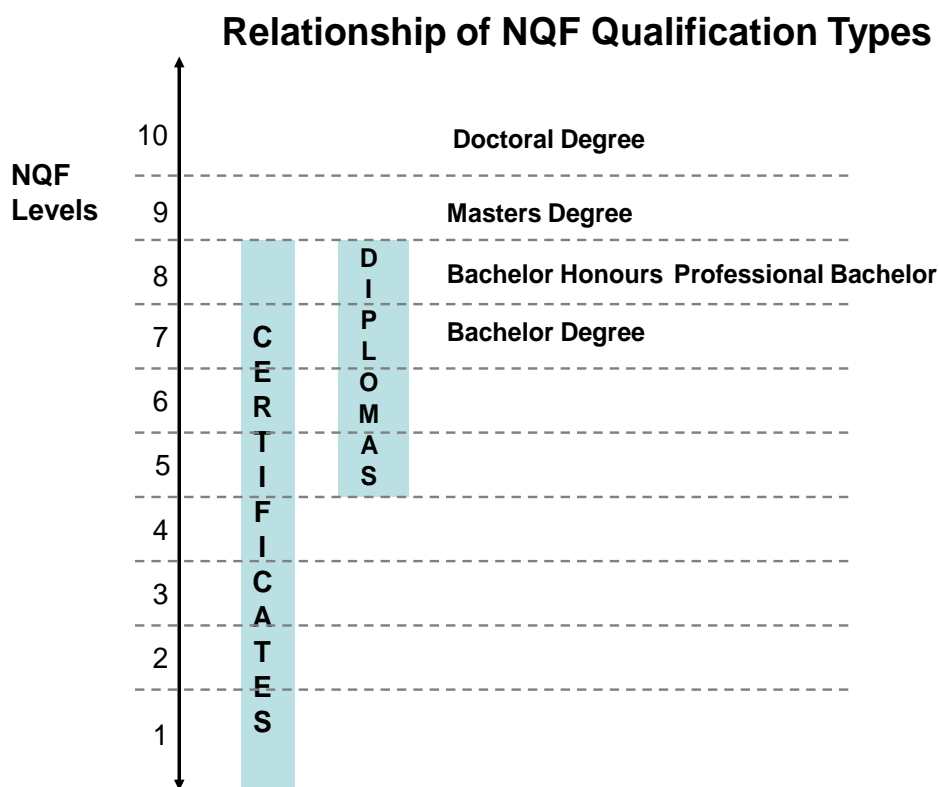
The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established as a statutory body through Act 29 of 1996. Its purpose is to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. The NQA networks with other organizations in order to keep abreast of current trends and developments in education and training at local, regional and international levels. It makes formal agreements with stakeholders for the purposes of setting standards, accrediting education and training institutions and their courses, and facilitating student mobility and credit transfer. One such agreement between the NQA and the Namibia Training Authority (NTA) mandates the latter to coordinate the setting of competency standards and associated national curriculum modules and assessment criteria for vocational trades up to NQF Level 5. These are made available as packages to training providers. Whilst the NQA has the mandate to accredit vocational training providers, the NTA is responsible for their registration. The NQA has signed an agreement with the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) mandating the latter to register private higher education institutions. Recognised higher education programmes are those that are accredited by the NQA and other statutory bodies such as the Ministry of Education or examination boards.

The NQA maintains close working relationships with the awarding bodies. These include the Directorate for National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA), the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), the University of Namibia (UNAM), the Polytechnic of Namibia, and the Namibian College for Open Learning (NAMCOL).

Two statutory bodies, the Namibia Tourism Board (NTB) and Roads Authority of Namibia, have developed a significant number of unit standards for registration on the NQF.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Table 1. The Namibian Qualifications Framework



Source: Namibian Qualifications Authority, 2011.

The NQF comprises 10 levels, covering secondary, vocational and higher education. Each level is defined by a level descriptor (Ministry of Education, 2006). Accredited institutions register all the qualifications they award on the NQF. In order to qualify for registration, the learning outcomes required for successful completion of a qualification must be clearly stated.

Some learning outcomes are expressed as unit standards which can be awarded independently of the whole qualification. This allows learners to receive recognition for their learning achievements even if these fall short of the requirements for the award of a full qualification.

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

In 2009, the NQA and NTA were assigned the responsibility of overseeing the development of a national policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). An RPL steering committee with representatives from different sectors was constituted to work on the draft policy. Following a consultation process, approval was granted by the Minister of Education. Full implementation will commence once the policy has been ratified. Registered education and training providers are required to develop institution-specific policies for RPL which must be aligned to the national policy. Once this policy is implemented, RPL candidates will be able to earn credit for unit standards or full NQF qualifications.

Two separate policies on RPL are currently in operation. One was developed by the NTA for VET institutions. The other was developed by NAMCOL. NAMCOL's policy defines RPL as 'the process of identifying, matching, assessing and accrediting the knowledge, skills and experience that candidates have gained through formal, informal or non-formal learning' (NAMCOL, 2008).

At present, NAMCOL's RPL policy is being applied to broaden access to the College's post-secondary programmes at certificate and diploma levels. RPL applicants to NAMCOL enter into an agreement with the College before undergoing a series of assessments designed to allow them to display their competences. The process involves pre- and post-assessment interviews, portfolio development and proficiency tests. At the end of the process, candidates are given written feedback on the outcome of their assessment.

Apart from a few institutional initiatives on RPL as exemplified by NAMCOL, there is on the whole, very little horizontal or vertical movement of learners between the different education and training sub-systems. One reason for this is that these sub-systems still function in silos, with insufficient coordination leading to duplication of the programmes on offer. Another reason is that the founding acts of publicly funded educational institutions empower the latter to award their own qualifications, weakening the NQF's efforts to unify the system. Training bodies have been slow to register their qualifications on the NQF, creating a further obstacle to mobility. In order to address this problem, the NQA has issued a directive that all qualifications must be registered on the framework by 2015.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The NQA represents Namibia's membership on the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation, which oversees progress towards a Regional Qualifications Framework for the Southern African Development Community.

The NQA is negotiating formal Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with quality assurance bodies in the region, with the aims of strengthening information sharing about providers and their courses, building and sharing staff expertise in quality assurance, and facilitating research on matters of shared interest. Formal agreements currently exist with the following bodies: the Botswana Training Authority (BoTA), the Tertiary Education Council of Botswana (TEC), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the National Council for Higher Education (South Africa), the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland, the Roads Authority of Namibia, and the Mauritius Qualifications Authority.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Namibia has been at the forefront of NQF development in SADC countries. Namibia aims at facilitating assessment, certification and quality assurance as well as learner mobility across education and training systems. This has had implications for the development of post-primary education in Africa. Post-primary education as well as diversified secondary education are increasingly perceived to include skills development and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), thus being elements of a coherent system of education and training, which includes both theoretical and applied learning. However, while the Namibian Qualifications Framework covers the whole spectrum of general education and vocational training activities, there is still work to be done to have a linked system with common structures for transferability between education and training and vice-à-versa.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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