SEYCHELLES

The Seychelles Qualifications Framework (SQF) is a 10-level framework which was designed in 2007 following the creation in 2005 of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) under the Qualifications Authority Act (Ministry of Education, 2008, pp. 8-11).

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Seychelles aims to double its GDP by 2017. In order to develop the human resources required to meet this goal, the government is taking steps to improve training in vocational, managerial and service skills. Training is to be restructured in alignment with internationally recognized standards and certification processes. This will be made possible through partnerships with international institutions of higher learning which will offer a variety of training courses to Seychelles students, from skills programmes and short courses through to full qualification programmes.

The active involvement of sectors of the economy such as tourism, fisheries and financial services will help strengthen links between training and the world of work, making the Seychelles education system more responsive to both local and international labour market needs (Ministry of Education, 2008, pp. 15-16). Particular emphasis is being placed on improving the IT skills of the workforce so as to render it more competitive in today's technologically-driven business environment.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The SQF is designed to provide:

- high quality training and qualifications;
- recognition and credit for prior learning and skills;
- parity between academic and vocational qualifications;
- qualifications based on unit standards linked to the requirements of industry and society;
- a more integrated approach to education and training;
- a coherent learning system offering possibilities for mobility between different courses and levels; and
- qualifications which are nationally and internationally comparable and portable (SQA, n.d.).

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The SQA uses fixed standards to evaluate existing training courses and position them on the SQF. Although the SQA was created in 2005, this work did not begin until 2008. Thereafter all providers of education and training programmes leading to the achievement of unit standards and/or full qualifications were required to become accredited by the SQA.

The development of the SQA and SQF needs to be understood in the context of the major political and social changes that were taking place at the time, as the Seychelles moved from a state-controlled to a market-oriented economy. This shift profoundly affected the management of key sectors of the economy and provided the impetus for the government's Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), a branch of the broader Human Resource Development Programme (HRDP)

instigated by the National Human Resource Development Council (NHRDC) which was set up by the National Human Resource Act in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2008, p.14).

The NHRDC and Department of Employment have been instrumental in creating mechanisms for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) aligned to SQF qualifications and unit standards. The NHRDC provides direction on manpower sectors earmarked as potential RPL areas.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The SQF has 10 levels, ranging from primary to doctoral and post-doctoral qualifications. These are based on a hierarchy of competences which are detailed in the level descriptors provided for each level. Post-secondary level qualifications are further categorized into types such as diplomas, associate degrees and certificates, and carry a fixed minimum number of credits and notional hours in order to provide flexibility in programme design. The smallest number of notional hours for the achievement of an SQF qualification is 1200, amounting to 120 credits (SQA, n.d.). The input-based national curriculum rather than the learning outcomes-based qualifications continues to be the framework for general education up to and including secondary level.

Core skills form an essential part of all SQF qualifications. These include communication skills (including the use of the English language, which is considered essential for promoting international mobility), numeracy and IT skills, and life skills, which include social behaviour and ethics.

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

The SQF offers a number of progression pathways by which candidates can move from basic to more advanced certificates. In addition to this, mechanisms for RPL give individuals who have gained significant experience in a particular field the opportunity to become formally qualified at a level commensurate with their abilities. Candidates may achieve partial or even whole qualifications through RPL, or may qualify for credit at a higher level than that of the qualification applied for. At degree level up to 50 per cent of a qualification can be obtained through RPL. Once implementation of the SQF is complete, learners will be able to register for a number of courses over an extended period and thus accumulate credits towards a recognized qualification.

RPL is not a new concept in the Seychelles. Trade Tests in a variety of vocational disciplines have been conducted for more than three decades. Training institutions are actively involved in the RPL process. One example is the upgrading of qualifications in the health sector in the fields of environmental health and health information. The Employment Department sensitizes its own employees to RPL so that they are able to spread the message and encourage workers in other fields to undergo RPL assessment. The SQA has campaigned, for example, for the formation of a Hairdressers' Association to develop standards for the hairdressing profession in the Seychelles and encourage hairdressers to undergo RPL assessment.

In the area of adult learning the SQF recognizes all forms of learning, formal, non-formal and informal. A special division of the Ministry of Education, the Technical and Further Education Division (TFED), is responsible for linking youth and adult education to the SQF. The Adult Learning and Distance Education Centre (ALDEC), one of the training centres of the TFED, offers distance programmes in collaboration with international universities such as the University of South Africa and the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Achieving parity between academic and vocational qualifications is considered vital for the creation of a pool of skilled labour to meet the needs of the economy and promote development (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 17-19). It is important that young people and adults studying for vocational and technical qualifications do not feel that their chosen path is inferior to that of their academic counterparts. Articulation between TVET and higher academic education is increasingly becoming a reality in the Seychelles, largely due to SQF-led reforms. Students of some vocational training institutions, such as the Seychelles Polytechnic and the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS), are being admitted to higher education courses based on assessment of their skills and experience; Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 35).

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Seychelles is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and thus plays a part in the ongoing development of the regional qualifications framework.

The SQA contracted the South African Qualifications Authority in 2007 to help build capacity to establish the SQF.

Like Mauritius, the Seychelles has a well-established and functioning NQF. However, the SQF is more closely aligned to the Competency-based Modular Training (CBMT) approach, whereas the Mauritian Qualifications Framework follows an outcomes-based approach

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Communicating information about the SQF to all stakeholders is the most ambitious project carried out by the SQA so far. Several groups have already been successfully sensitized to the importance of RPL, including health workers, construction workers, and human resource development officers in both private and public enterprises. However, education and training providers have yet to become fully cognizant of the importance of RPL and integrate it into their work. The SQA is working with a number of partners to address this situation, most importantly the Interorganizational Working Group for RPL which is made up of international consultants, NHRDC members and representatives of the employment sector.

Quality assurance processes in the Seychelles are still at an early stage of development as the country continues to work on rationalizing the qualifications landscape. Once these are in place, the next stage will be the accreditation of training providers. The two processes when completed should provide transparent quality assurance for certification.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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