

SRI LANKA

Established in 2005, the Sri Lankan National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) is 'a unified national system established by statute, covering all agencies providing vocational and tertiary level education and training except for religious education, occult sciences, sports and recreation, dancing, music, performing arts or any other form of aesthetics and education or training in leadership' (ILO, 2010a, p. 25).

In 2012 Sri Lanka established the Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework (SLQF), which is a nationally consistent framework for all higher education qualifications offered in Sri Lanka. SLQF also integrates the NVQF developed by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission.

1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The socio-economic challenges facing Sri Lanka today include high youth unemployment and a lack of career development opportunities for young people. Most learning takes place in non-formal and informal settings, yet there are no mechanisms in place for the recognition of such learning. The formal education and training system, meanwhile, is limited in both capacity and relevance so much so that some certificates do not even get accepted within the education system itself. Courses are out of touch with both the demands of industry and the learning needs and socio-economic circumstances of young people

In the past, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) was often seen as a dead end. Few secondary school leavers opted for TVET courses, which created excessive pressure on university admissions. Raising the profile of TVET is therefore a priority for the Sri Lankan Government.

In line with the 2009 National Policy on Higher Education and TVET, the Government plans to take measures to make TVET a more attractive and clear alternative to university education and thus to combat the widespread perception that TVET is an inferior option. Efforts will be made to encourage private sector training providers to take a more active role in both training and employing TVET graduates.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Government sees the NVQF as a tool for:

- coordinating the multiplicity of TVET training providers currently operating under different ministries;
- providing quality assured qualifications with clearly described competency levels and learning demands, enabling trainees to make informed decisions about which qualifications to choose and employers to understand the level of attainment of their prospective employees;
- ensuring high standards in both acquisition and assessment of competencies;
- aligning TVET to national development goals, with an eye towards fulfilling the skills needs of emerging economic sectors;

- fostering stronger linkages with industry and commerce through greater stakeholder participation in the development of skills standards, assessment processes and curricula;
- making training more responsive to industry needs by bringing industry's use of skills standards and competency-based training into the educational sphere;
- streamlining application and assessment processes in order to increase access to competency-based training for potential trainers;
- developing a competency-based curriculum;
- fostering better links between workplaces and TVET centres;
- providing recognized certificates for Sri Lankans wishing to work or study abroad, thus improving international links for the Sri Lankan TVET sector;
- increasing collaboration between well-resourced and less well-equipped training centres through student and trainer transfers and resource sharing;
- enhancing quality, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and transparency.

With the establishment of the SLQF in 2012, the thrust of SLQF shifted from TVET system towards:

- enhancing quality, access and equity in higher education, training, employment opportunities at all levels;
- helping employers to understand the levels of knowledge, skills and competences of qualification holders;
- developing positive attitudes and all-round personal development of qualification holders;
- facilitating lateral and vertical mobility, and progression within higher education and career pathways;
- Making qualifications offered by different institutions comparable to each other;
- Promoting the development of higher education and vocational training programmes appropriate to the different qualification levels.
- recognizing prior learning and promote lifelong learning.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The development of SLQF was initiated in 2009 with the assistance from the World Bank funded Improvement of Relevance and Quality of undergraduate Education (IRQUE) Project and continued with the funding from the Higher Education for the Twenty First Century (HETC) Project, Preparatory work for the development of SLQF A was undertaken by a National Committee comprising:

- A representative of the Ministry of Higher Education, nominated by the Hon. Minister of Higher Education.
- A representative of the University Grants Commission, nominated by its chair.
- The Director General of Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE) or his nominee.
- The Director General of Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka.
- A representative of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council.
- A representative of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors.

The NVQF initiative in Sri Lanka was implemented in 2005 through two skills development projects supported by the Asian Development Bank (ILO, 2010b). The main goal of the first project, the Skills Development Project which ran from 2001, to 2007, was 'developing NVQF infrastructure and capacity'. Its other aims included 'the development of an accreditation system, assessor training and certification, the expansion of the National Trade Testing Programme and the establishment of a quality management system' (ILO, 2010a, p. 25). The second project, called the Technical Education Development Project (2006-2010), aimed to 'set up review systems for the skill standards developed in the earlier project' (Ibid.).

While no new bodies were established for the purpose of implementing the NVQF, the mandates of existing bodies have been modified slightly. The bodies concerned are:

- The Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), a statutory organization responsible for managing the NVQF, determining occupations for skills standards

development, developing national skills standards, awarding certificates to trainees and registering assessors' certifications.

- The Registration Division of the TVEC, which oversees the registration of public and private training providers, the accreditation of courses, Quality Assurance Systems (QASs), and monitoring and auditing. QAS holds regular audits to review NVQF quality assurance mechanisms, registration and accreditation. It is certified under the International Organization Standardisation (ISO) 9001:2008 certification.
- The National NVQ Steering and Coordination Committee of the TVEC, which is responsible for the implementation of the NVQF. All issues connected with the administration of the NVQF are discussed and decided on by the Steering Committee.

Other organizations involved in the development of standards, training of assessors and testing of applicants are the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) and the Department of Technical Education and Training (technical colleges division). NAITA assists the TVEC with regard to competency standards and assessment resource development. The University of Vocational Technology (Univotec) assists the TVEC with regard to curriculum and learning resource development and assessor training.

While there is a strong emphasis on public education and training providers, private and non-governmental organizations and training centres have also been registered and accredited to provide NVQF courses (ILO, 2010b). Training institutions acknowledge the benefits of the NVQF, since it allows them to award their trainees nationally valid certificates, thereby enhancing their own reputation and image at the national level.

Trade unions have been involved in the development and implementation of the NVQF in the past but their involvement in this regard has diminished, with more focus being given to union members' 'bread and butter' issues such as salaries and working conditions (ILO, 2010a, p. 27).

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

NVQF qualifications are based on national competency standards which are identified by industry stakeholders. The Sri Lankan NVQF currently has seven levels and competency standards for 45 qualifications. The competency standards are further divided into 63 smaller unit standards. Curricula are centrally developed and are based on specified learning outcomes. Levels are assigned to units of competency standards according to the complexity of learning demands and degree of responsibility that the learner is obliged to take on.

National competency standards are designed to be effective for performance in a particular industry sector or occupation. Competency standards focus on what is expected from a worker in the workplace rather than on the learning process. Emphasis is placed on the ability to carry out a task within a given context and to transfer and apply skills, knowledge and attitudes to new situations and environments.

The following five components comprise a competency unit:

- Task operation
- task management
- problem solving
- job, role or work environment handling application of competencies to different environments.

Competency units at levels 1-4 are clustered into occupation-specific packages in accordance with industry requirements. The units are expected to also include learning content and not just learning outcomes.

Levels 5 and 6 include sector-specific core competency units; Competency units at levels 5 and 6 carry a credit value as well as a level.

The credit system used is the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Level 7 leads to a degree which is based on curricula prepared in terms of learning outcomes.

SLQF comprises 10 levels and the descriptors of each of these levels are stated in a comprehensive manner including intellectual abilities, cognitive and soft skills. The demands and complexity of learning outcomes increase with each level. The purposes and characteristics of each qualification as well as the minimum admission requirements are also stated in the SLQF.

Except for higher education, the levels are not directly related to the years of study; rather, the volume of learning at each level is described in terms of credits. Two or more qualifications at the same level indicates that the qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of general levels of complexity. However, each qualification at the same SLQF level does not have the same purpose or specific learning outcomes. The SLQF levels and comparable NVQF levels are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework Levels (SLQF) levels and the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) level

| Level | Qualification awarded | |
|---------|---|------------------|
| SLQL 10 | Doctoral Degree, MD with Board Certification | |
| SLQL 9 | Master of Philosophy, Masters by fulltime research, DM | |
| SLQF 8 | Masters with course work and a Research component | |
| SLQL 7 | Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma, Masters with course work | |
| SLQL 6 | Honours Bachelors Bachelors in Professional disciplines | |
| SLQL 5 | Bachelor's Degree, Bachelor of Technology, Bachelors Double Major Degree, Pundit, Royal Pundit, Nipun | NVQL 7 |
| SLQL 4 | Higher Diploma | NVQL 6 |
| SLQL 3 | Diploma | NVQL 5 |
| SLQL 2 | Advanced Certificate | NVQL4 |
| SLQL 1 | Certificate | NVQL 3 NVQL 2 |

Source: Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework, Ministry of Higher Education, 2012

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

Sri Lanka's NVQF has been developed with a view towards integrating technical and/or vocational and higher education (further levels may be added in future). All three sectors of the education system – general education, higher education and TVET – have been subject to reforms in order to accommodate the formation of progression pathways across the various sectors. The framework allows for an interface with secondary education and provides pathways for holders of TVET qualifications to proceed to higher education. NVQF qualifications are designed to allow trainees to enter and exit the system at different stages with qualifications at different levels.

Vertical mobility through the system is based on the principle of seamless progression. Access to qualifications at levels 1-4 is possible both directly and progressively through an accredited course or through the recognition of prior learning. The prerequisite for access to level 5 diploma courses is NVQF level 3 plus academic ability equivalent to General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level. The entry qualification for level 7, the degree programme, is NVQF level 5. In order to maintain

links between the lower and higher levels, the occupations at levels 1-4 and the fields of study at levels 5-7 are clustered to provide the necessary upgrading of qualifications and competencies. The creation of industry-linked courses at NVQF levels 5-7 is costly due to the extensive equipment and infrastructure required (ADB, 2011).

The University of Vocational Technology (Univotec) was established to provide pathways to higher education for TVET students who are unable to enter conventional universities. Students who have achieved the relevant qualifications at levels 5 and 6 can proceed from national diploma to degree programmes. Those with level 6 qualifications are eligible to receive appropriate credit transfers towards a degree programme determined by Univotec.

Assessment is conducted using two methods, one for levels 1-4 and the other for level 5 and above. At levels 1-4, competency-based assessments focus on the performance criteria specified in the respective competency units. For learning outcomes-based modular qualifications at levels 5 and 6, assessment is conducted in two stages: formative and summative. Formative assessment comprises the identification and documentation of existing skills and assessors being able to interpret these skills against some level of the NVQF. The summative part includes an assessment panel consisting of three members, with at least one representing the industry that deals with the particular area of technology concerned. The final outcome of the assessment is determined by the assessment panel. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is defined as the process whereby competencies acquired through industry practice or previous training are recognized, allowing them to be put towards a certificate or credits. RPL is an important instrument for promoting NVQF-aligned certification, particularly in occupations for which demand is high.

So far, the largest number of certificates issued through RPL have been awarded to beauticians, hairdressers and bakers. RPL is also especially important for people who want to work or study in other countries. There is no difference between certifications resulting from accredited courses and those achieved through RPL. However, the award of a full qualification through RPL is limited to NVQF level 4. Accredited courses are expected to issue a separate certificate of participation as proof of attendance.

Two institutions are authorized to conduct RPL: NAITA and the Vocational Training Authority (VTA). Established under Sri Lanka Act No. 12 in 1995, the VTA consists of six National Vocational Training Institutes, 22 District Vocational Training Centers and 232 Vocational Training Centres. The VTA operates under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development and provides rural youth with skills training combined with workshops on information technology and entrepreneurship. To avoid corruption in RPL (attempting assessment without the necessary preparation, exerting influence over the assessors, etc.) the government has stipulated one to five years of experience as a requirement for NVQF levels 2 and 3 and a further two years for NVQF level 4. However, craftspersons with a minimum of five years' experience may be considered for assessment at level 4 directly.

The integration of the NVQF into the SLQF has further strengthened the pathways of lateral mobility between the vocational education sector and higher education sector. To facilitate the vertical mobility within the higher education system, SLQF includes the recognition of accredited prior learning.

The Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework helps qualification holders to know the level of their qualification. In addition, the SLQF helps potential employers to know the level of learning and the attributes of a particular qualification holder. SLQF is useful to higher education institutions (both state and non-state) in designing their courses in terms of the minimum level of learning effort and the number of credits that should be earned by a qualification holder. In this way, SLQF contributes to strengthening the quality of higher education qualifications offered in universities and higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The SLQF provides a clear system to develop links with higher education institutions abroad. With the globalization of higher education, national qualification frameworks developed in several other countries have helped to evaluate the higher educational qualifications obtained in different countries. Sri Lanka is part of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which cooperates in the areas of education, training and human resource development. SAARC has established a South Asian University with a Centre of Excellence to provide world-class facilities and professional faculty to students and researchers drawn from every country of the region.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Sri Lanka's efforts in developing its NVQF are receiving increasing attention in and beyond neighbouring countries. The Asian Development Bank report on 'The National Qualifications Framework for Skills Training Reform in Sri Lanka' offers general recommendations for other countries, as well as outlining a way forward for Sri Lanka (ADB, 2011).

The general lessons to be drawn from the ADB report are the following:

- Considering the ad hoc development of vocational courses in many countries and the resulting multitude of qualifications, an NVQF will help to systematise the training system and offer unified qualifications.
- NVQFs developed in different countries may be similar. However, competency standards should be designed to suit a country's own education system, labour market and society.
- Political commitment, a well-functioning administrative system, and a core team of dedicated professionals are essential for the successful development and implementation of an NVQF and of large-scale TVET reforms in general. Local professionals must lead the development and implementation processes.
- The development and implementation of an NVQF should be pursued until it becomes sustainable and the reforms are strongly rooted in the implementing agencies. Public acceptance of the system will then be the driving force.

The recommendations specifically for Sri Lanka include:

- Further development of the NVQF and related training courses must take into account emerging labour market needs and environmentally friendly technologies.
- Efficient and reliable processes of assessment are vital in order to maintain industry stakeholders' confidence in the system.
- The NVQF must cater not only to lower levels but also to higher and diploma levels. Public and private providers should be encouraged to establish courses at these levels.
- Univotec should embark on a strong staff development programme and establish links with industry and higher education institutions in order to develop degree-level courses incorporating mandatory workplace-based learning.

SLQF offers a transparent and coherent framework for the learner to optimize his/her objective of learning throughout life, while at the same time improving many vital aspects of learning and assessment of learning processes.

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