

# TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Trinidad and Tobago has a seven-level qualifications framework for the tertiary and vocational education sectors. The seven-level qualifications framework represents the first step towards formalizing Trinidad and Tobago's hitherto disparate education system. The aim is to create a unified structure in which learners can use credit transfer to move seamlessly from one programme or institution to another. The qualifications framework in the vocational sector is referred to as the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualifications Framework (TTNVQ). The seven-level qualifications framework is currently operational.

## 1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago's framework for sustainable development is based on seven interconnected pillars. One of these pillars is to develop 'A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy – Building on the Native Genius of Our People' (Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (MSTTE), 2010). The government recognizes that a number of challenges must be overcome in order to meet this goal. First among these challenges is the need to reform the education and training landscape. Education and training at all levels, including lifelong learning, is in need of rationalization, expansion and integration if Trinidad and Tobago is to equip its citizens with the entrepreneurial, ethical and critical thinking skills demanded by today's labour market.

The MSTTE aims to develop policies that are internationally benchmarked and driven by labour market needs. It understands that human capital development is a major contributor to economic growth and sustainable wealth creation. Its principal strategy, therefore, is to expand tertiary education to a 60% participation rate, a target which it holds to be attainable thanks to the introduction in 2000 of increased public sector incentives such as scholarships and long-term technical assistance awards for proceeding to tertiary education.

The government plans to strengthen connections between TVET and academic higher education in order to facilitate the transfer of learning and skills between the two. This will ultimately create a more competent workforce, thus supporting industrial development.

The MSTTE envisages a number of innovative policies to encourage more members of at-risk groups such as youth and low-skilled workers to participate in tertiary education. These include rationalizing the post-secondary sector to improve efficiency and accountability and to avoid duplication. In the long run, the Ministry aims to develop an overarching system to guide the management and operation of all forms of education (tertiary education, TVET and lifelong learning) in Trinidad and Tobago.

## 2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Government is committed to:

- creating a holistic and integrated system of education and training from early childhood through primary, secondary and tertiary education to lifelong learning at all levels, including home-based, community-based and workplace-based education;

- facilitating student mobility between secondary and post-secondary/tertiary levels, within TVET, and between TVET and other forms of learning;
- facilitating the transfer of credits from one educational institution to another;
- making education and training more responsive to changing labour market demands, thus increasing education and career opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago's citizens; and
- making Trinidad and Tobago's qualifications internationally comparable.

### **3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago (ACTT) is the regulatory body for quality assurance in post-secondary and tertiary education. It provides the following services: accreditation, registration, recognition, conferment of institutional titles, programme approval, equivalence assessment and quality enhancement.

Learning standards are also set by ACTT, which encourages institutions to shift to curricula based on learning outcomes expressed in terms of competences gained. Quality assurance measures have been introduced to standardize learning outcomes and allow for accountability. Various institutions have identified a profile of their ideal graduate based on the government's Vision 2020 statement (National Institute of Higher Education Research Science and Technology (NIHERST), 2004). The National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago (NTATT) is the body responsible for overseeing TVET in Trinidad and Tobago. Its mission is to establish a national system to coordinate, harmonize and evaluate all TVET provision in the country. The NTATT laid the foundations for the five-level TTNVQ framework. Cabinet Minute 736 of 27 March 2008 mandated the NTATT to develop a world class labour force that is competent, innovative and entrepreneurial. In order to enable institutions to deliver the quality of training required to produce such a labour force, the NTATT has developed standardized curricula which provide all training institutions with regional and international accreditation.

Trinidad and Tobago follows a National Curriculum whose internationally approved design incorporates the latest theories on teaching and learning associated with Competency Based Education and Training (CBET). Assessment is performance-based, and is conducted according to rigorous criteria designed to reveal a candidate's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) is the official certifying body which quality assures and awards CVQ Units at Levels I and II to students who have met the requirements stipulated in the Regional Occupational Standards. The CXC is authorized by heads of state in the region to carry out regional certification at secondary level. The existence of an external awarding body at this level makes assessment more objective and thus encourages stakeholders' acceptance of outcomes-based learning.

### **4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The qualifications framework for the tertiary sector is divided into seven levels from the Certificate at Level 1 to the Doctorate at Level 7. The levels are differentiated according to the following parameters:

- complexity of subject matter
- breadth of competences required
- degree of specialization
- transferability of competences
- ability to innovate and to cope with non-routine activities
- ability to plan and organize work and to supervise others.

As a result, similar jobs are supported by similar qualifications.

**Table 1. Qualifications Framework for the Tertiary and Vocational Sectors**

Level	Type of certification	Skills achieved
1	Certificate	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the tasks required to accomplish a routine job and the practical skills to perform those tasks effectively. Can apply learned responses to straightforward problems.
2	Certificate	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the main problems in his/her field of study and the practical skills necessary for employment in that field. Can solve some practical problems in the area by applying learned principles.
3	Diploma	Candidate demonstrates knowledge of the underlying principles in his/her field of study and the practical skills necessary to interpret and evaluate these principles in a related field of employment. Candidate is able to present, interpret and evaluate qualitative and quantitative data, to develop lines of argument, and to make sound judgments in accordance with the basic principles of the field.
4	Associate Degree or Higher Diploma	Candidate demonstrates knowledge and critical understanding of the established principles in his/her field of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed. Can apply principles outside the context in which they were first studied and in an employment context. Demonstrates knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the field and is able to critically evaluate different approaches to solving problems in the field and related employment fields. Understands the limits of his/her knowledge and how these impact on analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.
5	Baccalaureate, Bachelor's Degree, Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma	Candidate demonstrates a systematic understanding of the key principles of his/her field of study. Shows coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by the cutting edge of research in the field. Can devise and defend arguments and/or solve problems by accurately deploying ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of the field. Understands how these techniques can be used in employment. Can describe and comment on aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship in the field. Shows an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge. Candidate can manage his/her own learning and make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources.
6	Master's Degree, Postgraduate Diploma, Professional qualifications	Candidate demonstrates a systematic understanding and critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the cutting edge of his/her field of study or professional practice. Shows a comprehensive knowledge of techniques applicable to his/her own research or professional practice, and applies this knowledge in original ways. Demonstrates a practical understanding of how established research techniques are used to create and interpret knowledge in the field. Can critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the field. Can evaluate and critique methodologies and, where appropriate,

		propose new hypotheses.
7	Doctoral Degree	Candidate demonstrates a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge and advanced research techniques at the cutting edge of an academic discipline or area of professional practice. Through original research or other advanced scholarship, candidate creates and interprets new knowledge of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication. Demonstrates an ability to conceptualize, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge and to adjust the design in the light of unforeseen problems.

Source: ACTT, 2007.

Vocational qualifications programmes are designed to impart the practical skills required in specific job roles or sectors. Courses tend to be classroom-based with assessment by written and practical examinations. There is tension between performance-based assessment and assessment by written and practical examinations.

TTNVQs are based on national occupational standards. Industry experts come together to define the standards for top performance in their industries. These standards are then translated to the curriculum and assessment procedures developed to encompass them. All TTNVQs are represented on the five-level TTNVQ framework, which ranges from Level 1 (Semi-Skilled) to Level 5 (Chartered and Advanced Professional Level).

**Table 2. TTNVQ framework**

Level 5	Chartered and Advanced Professional
Level 4	Professional
Level 3	Technician
Level 2	Craft
Level 1	Pre-Craft (Semi-Skilled)

Source: ACTT, 2007.

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

At present, no national policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) exists in Trinidad and Tobago, although there are national policies intended to broaden access to higher education. In the past two years some tertiary education providers have begun to award credit for prior learning. These providers also evaluate the impact of informal and non-formal learning on the progress of adult learners, whose enrolment in these institutions has substantially increased. So far, however, few institutions have formalized their policies for RPL.

This slow progress is largely attributable to the difficulty educational providers face in convincing employers of the value of non-formal and informal learning. The concept of RPL is new to the Caribbean, and a traditionalist approach to education has been paramount for many years. Many therefore resist what they see as a radical departure from cherished ideals. Even within tertiary education institutions there is substantial resistance to the RPL initiative. This makes it difficult for the government to achieve its aim of integrating graduates into a permeable lifelong learning system. In the institutions that do practise RPL to some degree, learners' competences are measured via portfolios and interviews. Candidates are accepted for RPL assessment following an initial interview during the admissions process. Various documents may be submitted as evidence of competences, including letters from employers, samples of work, and critical reflective statements. Mentors assist candidates in developing their portfolio and presenting the information contained therein to the assessor, who then examines the evidence in order to ascertain whether the candidate has achieved 70 per cent or more of the competences required for completion of a course. If this is judged to be the case, exemption is granted, which means that the candidate is exempted from parts of the study

programme or is required to do a shorter training period in preparation for an examination for a full qualification. The introduction of effective systems of quality assurance and accreditation ensures that the quality of learning outcomes from RPL meets or exceeds internationally accepted standards.

In the TVET sector, the situation with regard to RPL is somewhat more promising. Trinidad and Tobago's TVET qualifications framework gives all candidates the opportunity to attain progressively higher qualifications in their selected occupation. Candidates are able to transfer credits between programmes from one level to another. Moreover, the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) system allows TVET learners to have their skills and knowledge validated, no matter how, when or where they were acquired. In PLAR, assessment of an individual's skills and knowledge against approved occupational standards may lead to the award of a full or partial occupational or professional qualification (TTNVQ or CVQ). Where necessary, further training in specific areas is recommended. Trinidad and Tobago is currently experiencing heightened demand for trained, competent and certified workers. Increased use of the PLAR system will help to fulfil this need by providing industries with a pool of certified workers who meet required occupational standards.

## **6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS**

In 1972, Commonwealth Caribbean leaders at the Seventh Heads of Government Conference decided to transform the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) into a Common Market and establish the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), of which the Common Market would be an integral part.

CVQ levels are consistent with the levels in the regional qualifications framework (ACTT, 2007) and are recognized and portable within CARICOM and the wider world. The CVQ is a broad-based preparation for employment which aims to produce workers able to meet the varied demands of the modern workplace. The award of a CVQ represents the achievement of a set of competences that define the core work of an occupational area. CVQs have parallel standing with academic qualifications at the same level and can provide access to higher education.

Over the past two decades the post-secondary and tertiary education sectors in Trinidad and Tobago have become a great deal more international. At first only indigenous programmes were provided at local public institutions, but recent arrangements such as franchises have enabled foreign universities and professional bodies to provide courses in the country. This applies in particular to tertiary education. TVET, on the other hand, remains almost totally regional.

The descriptors in Trinidad and Tobago's qualifications frameworks are derived from those in other countries' NQFs and represent internationally recognized standards. Levels 1 to 3 of the ACTT framework for tertiary education equate broadly to the first three levels of the five-level General Framework for Occupational Levels proposed by the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA). The ACTT framework has more levels than CANTA, however, because it covers academic as well as occupational qualifications. CANTA level 4 corresponds to ACCT level 4 or 5; CANTA level 5 is equivalent to ACCT level 5 or 6, whilst ACCT level 7 is reserved for doctoral qualifications.

ACTT is responsible for the free movement of skills within the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) through the recognition of foreign and local qualifications.

## **7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS**

The ACTT, which designs the Trinidad and Tobago Qualifications Framework, has been a key player in the development of a quality tertiary education sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Since launching its operations in November 2005, ACTT has registered 81 institutions, recognized 14 foreign awarding bodies/institutions, recognized 612 transnational programmes, issued 8,005 Statements of Recognition, approved 45 locally developed higher education programmes, granted candidacy for accreditation 11 institutions and accredited 3 institutions.

## **MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

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