

UGANDA

The Ugandan Vocational Qualifications Framework (UVQF) was officially introduced through the Business, Technical and Vocational Training (BTNET) Act of 2008 as a part of the BTNET's overarching ten-year strategic plan 'Skilling Uganda' (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

The most important sub-sectors of the Ugandan labour market are the informal economy and the agricultural sector. Some 70 per cent of the Ugandan workforce continues to work in agriculture. Employment in the non-agricultural informal sector (comprising mainly micro-enterprises, own account workers and unpaid family workers) accounts for 18 per cent of total employment and 58 per cent of non-agricultural employment.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Uganda is beset with problems. Chief among these is the irrelevance of TVET programmes, which mars the productivity and employment chances of an estimated 800,000 school leavers annually (Heitmann, 2012). Less than 40 per cent of large and medium firms regard the course content and methodologies of BTNET institutions as relevant. At the level of advanced technical qualifications, the limited coverage of practical skills as well as soft skills (such as communication, computer literacy, customer care, problem solving, work attitudes and ethics) in training programmes makes for low performance in modern work environments (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

Furthermore, only a narrow range of occupations are covered in BTNET programmes. Programmes do not address the skills requirements of modern and emerging sectors such as hospitality, ICT, business management and finance, mining and engineering, oil and gas, and environmental technologies. Employers are rarely represented in the rigidly supply-oriented BTNET system. The lack of a systematic labour market information system further decreases the system's responsiveness to demand.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The UVQF's objectives are to:

- align BTNET programmes and qualifications with the needs of the labour market, so as to produce graduates with employable skills;
- allow employers and industry experts to play a significant role in defining occupational standards and training content;
- safeguard against the institutionalization of supply-driven, academically-focused formal training programmes, which in the past failed to equip graduates with skills relevant to the needs of the labour market; and
- develop formal and (where possible and appropriate) non-formal programmes based on UVQF standards in order to facilitate progression within the BTNET system (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011).

Section 3 (5) of the 2008 BTNET Act highlights the following aims:

- to improve the relevance, accessibility, quality and affordability of BTVET for the purposes of progression and employment;
- to enhance workers' capabilities for employment and self-employment;
- to monitor gaps between supply of and demand for skills; and
- to establish financial sustainability and funding mechanisms.

Section 3 (3) of the BTVET Act defines the following aims of the UVQF:

- to determine the scope and levels of BTVET programmes and the roles of the different stakeholders in designing programme content;
- to separate training and delivery from quality assurance functions;
- to establish an institutional framework for the coordination of BTVET; and
- to establish an authority to regulate qualifications (standards, assessment and certification) and training delivery in formal and non-formal institutions.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Work towards a comprehensive qualifications framework for Uganda was started in 2000 by a task force set up by the BTVET department in the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). However, when the German-supported Promotion of Vocational Education and Training (PEVOT) Programme was requested by the Government of Uganda, the focus was shifted to the development of a sub-sector framework for vocational qualifications only. The original idea to establish an autonomous Qualifications Authority for vocational qualifications had to be abandoned due to resistance from Parliament and the MoES (Heitmann, 2012). Nevertheless, the development of occupational profiles, test item banks and modular curricula started in 2003 in a number of pilot projects.

The BTVET Act revitalized the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) which was made dysfunctional in 1998 when all education and training functions were transferred from line ministries to the MoES. The DIT is now the body in charge of quality assurance and assessment. Learners with employable skills are encouraged to apply to the DIT for assessment irrespective of the duration and form of their learning (formal, informal or non-formal) and of their gender and social background. The DIT started issuing UVQF qualification certificates with effect from 2009, phasing out the award of trade test certificates. It assures employers that every UVQF-certified individual is able to perform the relevant occupational tasks to the level of competence indicated on the qualification certificate.

The DIT is supervised by the Industrial Training Council (ITC), which is also the new policy-making organ for Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD) with representation from industry.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The UVQF has 5 levels. The level descriptors form a continuum in which the preceding levels are subsumed within those that follow.

Table 1: Generic Descriptors of Competence Levels

UGANDA VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (UVQF) SUMMARY OF GENERIC LEVEL DESCRIPTORS		
Level	Level descriptor	Comparable qualifications
Level 5	Candidate can apply a broad range of specialized knowledge and skills to interpret technical information, modify concepts, practices and procedures, and perform complex technical operations in unpredictable contexts. Can undertake activities with a high degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Shows a high degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Higher Diploma (HD)

Level 4	Candidate can apply a substantial range of specialized knowledge and skills to interpret technical information and perform and modify complex operations in a variety of contexts. Can undertake activities with a substantial degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Shows a substantial degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Ordinary Diploma (OD)
Level 3	Candidate can apply a broad range of knowledge and skills to perform complex work in varied contexts. Can undertake activities as a 'working supervisor' with a substantial degree of autonomy when results are checked on by superiors. Can find technical solutions and make proposals to modify technical operations. Shows a moderate degree of control of resources and managerial performance.	Certificate III
Level 2	Candidate can apply a moderate range of knowledge and skills to perform less complex work in non-routine and occasionally varied contexts. Can undertake directed activities with some degree of autonomy while working in a team, and can find simple technical solutions unaided. Shows a limited degree of control of resources.	Certificate II
Level 1	Candidate can apply a basic range of knowledge and skills to perform simple work in routine contexts. Can work with others under direct supervision. If self-employed, shows a limited ability to find technical solutions.	Certificate I
Elementary/ Entry level (partial qualification)	Candidate can apply a limited range of knowledge and skills to perform specific and simple tasks in routine contexts. Can work with others under direct supervision. If self-employed, shows a limited ability to find technical solutions. Note: Elementary/entry level abilities will be awarded a partial qualification based on modular assessment and certification.	Worker's PASS Transcript

Source: Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011.

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

The BTVET Act of 2008 makes provision for the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). Regulations to facilitate APL are supported by both stakeholders and TVET graduates, who have expressed a wish to be granted access to higher education via APL. This is catered for by Section 20 (5) of the UVQF, under which graduates of community polytechnics, vocational schools and training centres are offered the opportunity to progress to the next level of learning. Individuals are encouraged to undergo evidence-based assessments to determine the appropriate level for them. In this way, learners who have acquired skills in the informal economy will have the chance to re-join the formal system. In order to meet the needs of APL learners, occupational qualifications programmes on the UVQF are characterized by competence-based education and training (CBET) and flexible learning modules delivered in the form of Assessment and Training Packages (ATPs).

In 2009 DIT was able to assess roughly 2000 applicants on the basis of the old trade testing regulations, however, using gradually a test item bank developed under UVQF. However, these numbers must be seen in relation to the much larger numbers of students (18, 000 annually) who appear for examinations in formal TVET schools (Heitmann, 2012, p. 22).

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Technical Paper on Harmonization of Education Systems and Training Curricula (East African Community (EAC) Secretariat, April 2012) made several recommendations regarding the proposed

overarching qualifications framework for the East African region. The most important of these as regards the UVQF are as follows:

- A regional qualifications framework for TVET should be developed. It should feature guidelines and regulations for instruction, curriculum management and examination and assessment in the regional TVET sub-sector.
- A regulatory body should be established to accredit institutions and programmes, set and control standards, standardize awards, and ensure the quality and relevance of TVET programmes and assessment centres in the region.
- An inter-governmental body should be created to deal with TVET-related issues in the region. The East African Community Secretariat should schedule regular meetings of TVET experts to develop guidelines for harmonization of the regional TVET sub-sector.

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The Ugandan Government's vision for the future is to give all learners the opportunity to further their education up to tertiary level via an overarching National Qualifications Framework (NQF) covering general and higher education as well as TVET. The UVQF is seen as a forerunner to this framework, which will make education and training in Uganda truly democratic.

The first step towards this goal in the immediate future will be to expand the UVQF up to diploma level. This responds to the urgent request of employers to produce more diploma-level BTNET graduates with relevant practical skills. Curriculum development will be accelerated based on UVQF standards (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2011). The government also plans to raise the quality and profile of vocational training by strengthening links between TVET and the private sector.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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