

The National Qualifications Framework: An Introduction

Section 1: Context and Rationale

1.1. Introduction – the concept of the Framework

A National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a system which describes the types of qualifications, their levels and standards within the whole education and training system of the country. It is a structure of defined and nationally accredited qualifications, which are awarded at defined levels. It means, in other words, that a country has a single system to express the competencies of its workers. An NQF describes the interrelationships of the qualifications and progression from one level to another. It is therefore a route through which a country can bring education and training together in a single unified system. A qualifications framework is designed to provide quality assured, nationally recognized, and consistent training standards. It is supported by a quality assurance system which ensures that qualifications are issued only to those individuals who have met the standards, no matter how the standards have been achieved. National Qualification Frameworks are built on the twin pillars of national standards and quality assurance.

1.2. The International Context of Frameworks

The concept of a National Qualifications Framework is a fairly recent one. Since the early 1990s, various governments across the world have embarked on ambitious and far-reaching attempts to reform their education and training systems, with the intention of making education and training more relevant for the labour market. In many such cases, national qualifications frameworks have been the principal instrument used to facilitate the transformation processes of these systems. Though it owes its intellectual origins to educational developments in Britain, the first National Qualifications Authority was established in New Zealand a decade and a half ago, and from there it spread to other countries like Australia, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Brazil, Namibia and Mauritius to name but a few. There are country specific frameworks, but there are also ongoing projects for meta-frameworks or regional frameworks such as those in Europe, and the SADC region. By 2006 more than 60 countries and four regions were in one way or another involved in NQF development. In the SADC region, almost all of the countries have, by dint of region-wide consensus, embarked on NQF development projects.

1.3. The Context of the Framework in Seychelles

It has been national policy since 2000 to develop a National Qualifications Framework, and therefore appoint a National Qualifications Authority to administer and develop the framework. When the government started on this path five years ago the major rationale was that an NQF would form part of its “strategy to incorporate standards and quality into the national education and training system.” In his budget address of 2004 the President underlined the

commitment of the government to an NQA, and stated that work would be done over the coming year to establish the groundwork for such an entity.

Accordingly, in 2005 the Ministry of Education and Youth assigned a team of education specialists to the task of preparing the legislation, and drawing up a proposal pertaining to the nature of the qualifications authority that would be set up. Human resource capacity for the task was built partly from the investment of the government of Seychelles, from 1999, and the assistance of the Canadian government, from 2004, for study visits and consultancies. Such investments led to the development of much framework related material. This occurred against a backdrop of the review and standardization of courses in post-secondary institutions to the competency-based approach (CBA). With CBA development, the need for a framework became more marked.

1.4. Objectives of the Framework

The National Qualifications Framework is designed to provide:

- Quality assured, nationally recognized consistent training standards and qualifications
- Recognition and credit for knowledge and skills acquired

It aims to:

- Ensure comprehensiveness in the recognition of learning and qualifications attained in the country, while ensuring parity for occupational qualifications
- Promote and regulate the development of qualifications based on unit standards which are linked to the workplace and society requirements
- Promote a more integrated approach to education and training
- Increase articulation of qualifications and mobility of learners within a coherent learning system, considering the need for both national and international portability and comparability

Section 2: Definitions

2.1. Definition of the framework

The Act setting up the Seychelles Qualifications Authority defines the **National Qualifications Framework** as “a framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills and competence to be acquired by learners.”

The NQF establishes the regulations and principles that guide the development of qualifications. It states the criteria to be met for qualifications to be recognized nationally. It defines the conditions for learners to be certified. It is also a set of

policies and regulations which guides all providers of education and training about the conditions necessary for them to operate.

2.2. Architectural Features of the Qualifications Map

The qualifications map is the most visible aspect of the NQF. It is, in a sense, the public face of the NQF. For our purposes the **Qualifications Map** can be defined as:

the structure of nationally approved qualifications in terms of defined levels and their descriptors, qualifications types, notional hours and pathways..

The term **level** as used in the context of the qualifications map refers to “the particular level at which a unit standard or qualification is registered on the NQF.” For example, all doctoral and post doctoral qualifications would be registered at level 10. The hierarchy of levels is built not only on the basis of increasing cognitive challenge but also on practical skills development and degree of autonomy. **Levels descriptors** are “statements used to describe a hierarchy of learning outcomes in terms of reasoning and problem solving, autonomy and responsibility, knowledge, and degree of complexity of tasks.”

The term **Qualification Type** as used in the context of the qualifications map refers to “the specified nomenclature for qualifications at particular levels of the NQF.” Thus from the qualifications type of Master at Level 9, for example, can be derived Master of Public Administration, or Master of Science, as needed for that particular field or speciality.

The term **National**, as in Advanced National Diploma, for example, is reserved to signify “a nationally recognized, endorsed, and validated qualification bearing the imprimatur of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority.”

The term **Pathway** as used in the context of the qualifications map refers to the “access route to a specified qualification.” The pathway, for example, from Certificate to Advanced Diploma goes through the Advanced Certificate and the Diploma.

2.3. The Building Blocks of Qualifications on the Map

The Act setting up the Seychelles Qualifications Authority defines **Qualifications** as “the formal recognition of a learner’s achievement of the required number and range of credits or other requirements at a specified level of the qualifications framework.”

A qualification is firstly a planned combination of learning outcomes which may include-

- **Essential Unit Standards-** Refers to generic knowledge, skills, attitudes and values deemed necessary for a particular qualification and include

Communication, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology and Life Skills.

- **Specific Unit Standards-** Refers to standards which form part of a qualification and are directly related to the occupation, function and/or area of specialization.
- **Elective Unit Standards-** Refers to optional and/or specialized unit standards which form part of a qualification.

Secondly, a qualification at post-secondary/further and higher education level consists of a minimum number of 120 credits. A **credit** is equal to ten (10) notional hours of learning. A **notional hour** includes direct contact time with teachers and trainers, and non-contact time, which is time spent on independent study, working on assignments and on other forms of assessment. A **unit standard** is equal to 3 credits. Unit standards are registered statements of desired education and training competencies and their associated performance criteria together with administrative and other information (e.g. standard and level numbers, number of credits etc.).

Qualifications established by the SQA can be built up from separate unit standards which the individual has completed or has demonstrated as having the competency. The SQA recognizes training which is one unit standard or more in duration. One unit standard under the mandate of the SQA refers to a programme of learning comprising:

- Credits
- Formal assessment
- A minimum of 30 notional hours

Section 3: An overview of the Qualifications Map

3.1. The Map in General

The SQA has adopted a 10 level Qualifications map. The lowest qualification type on the map is the Primary Qualification and the highest the Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Qualifications. Generally, the map builds on the hierarchy of competencies, with each level of qualification becoming increasingly more complex as progress is made up the pathway of the map. This hierarchy of competencies is best seen in the level descriptors. For the layman, a concise version of the level descriptors is attached to this document. Qualification types follow an international orientation (as does much of the map).

It can be notice that the map is geared mostly at post-secondary/further and higher education level. This is understandable since the National Curriculum is already, in a sense, a framework for primary and secondary education. Therefore, for the time being, the framework addresses principally the higher levels of education and training.

3.2. Notional Hours

Notional hours, for example, have been established for the post-secondary/further and higher education level and not for General Education. A minimum number of notional hours has been set for the qualification types to provide some flexibility in the design and implementation of programmes. Hours are used rather than days or weeks to take into consideration the different modalities in the implementation of courses. The shortest allowable length for the implementation of a qualification on the map is 1200 hours, amounting to 120 credits.

3.3. The Qualifications Map

The map of qualifications is presented in Figure 1:

NQF Level	Qualification type	Notional hours (minimum)
10	Doctorate Degree	3600
9	Masters Degree	1600
8	Post-graduate Certificate Post-graduate Diploma	1200
7	Bachelors Degree	3600
6	National Advanced Diploma	1200
5	National Diploma	3600
4	High School Certificate (A Levels) National Advanced Certificate	2400
3	National Certificate	1200
2	Secondary certificate (IGCSE)	
1	Primary certificate	

Figure 1: Qualifications Map

Figure 2 is a summary of the level descriptors.

Qualification type	Descriptors	Type of Occupation
PhD, Post-Doctorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct cutting edge research in the field of study • Develop new techniques, ideas or approaches • Operate with complete autonomy 	Doctor, Researcher
Master	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has mastery of knowledge in the field of study • Propose solutions based on critical analysis of complex issues and research • Involved in management of resources and supervision of others. 	Expert/Specialist
Post Graduate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has in-depth specialized knowledge in the field of study • Apply specialized skills and principles based on systematic analysis of data in the field of study • Operate within broad autonomy 	Specialist
Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has in-depth knowledge in the field of study • Apply well-established principles, requiring a wide variety of data to solve problems in different contexts • Operate within broad autonomy 	Manager/supervisor
Advanced Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has specialized knowledge in the field of study • Apply varied and specialized procedures and techniques in the field of study requiring basic research • Operate within broad parameters and a certain autonomy 	Technician specialized
Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has broad knowledge in the field of study • Apply varied procedures and techniques, to solve concrete problems, in non-routine contexts • Operate under broad guidance 	Technician
Advanced Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has operational knowledge in the field of study • Apply a range of procedures and techniques in the field of study, to solve familiar problems in fairly routine contexts • Operate under general supervision 	Trades person/ Specialized at intermediate level
Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has basic operational knowledge in the field of study • Apply basic procedures and techniques in response to precise instructions • Operate under direct supervision 	Apprentice/ skilled at basic level

Figure 2: Summary of qualifications

General Advanced Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has in-depth knowledge in particular subject areas • Apply a range of procedures and techniques in the field of study, to solve problems in a wide range of contexts • Operate under general supervision 	Specialized general education
Secondary Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has broad-based knowledge • Apply basic procedures and techniques • Operate in a controlled environment and under direct supervision 	General education
Primary Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has basic knowledge • Apply basic procedures and techniques related to literacy, numeracy and IT skills involving development of desirable attitudes and values • Operate under continuous guidance, regular checking and with limited autonomy 	Basic educational foundation

Figure 2(continues): Summary of qualifications

A more comprehensive version of the level descriptors can be found in the Annex.

Section 4: Issues Arising from the Implementation of the Map

4.1. Implications for Learners

The map informs learners of the nature of qualifications on the framework. It indicates recognized qualifications types and the pathways to these. For learners with foreign certificates, the map is the main tool used to measure the “local currency” of their qualification.

4.2. Implications for Training Providers

The map clarifies for providers the nature of qualifications that are on offer and their levels. Training providers developing courses are guided by the descriptors and the notional hours, as well as other attendant regulations (for example, that of the definition of training under the SQA). Courses are validated using these criteria. Providers are to incorporate required unit standards for particular levels to enable the articulation of qualifications. In subjecting qualifications to validation, providers are to ensure that the required resources and policies are in place. This is especially critical for the process of accreditation of the provider to deliver the qualification.

4.3. Implications for Policy Makers

As the map becomes a reality the policies or current practices that need adjustment will be thrown into relief. Some of these, for example, the implications of the use of notional hours rather than days are immediately evident. Others, for

example, that of student selection into and progression within institutions may require alignment; resource implications, to cater for the essential unit standards (if these were not already being covered) will need to be addressed. From the implementation of the map a rationalised qualifications landscape will emerge, and in this scenario, salaries and schemes of service can also be rationalised and aligned with a national system where the value of qualifications is no longer uncertain.

4.4. Implications for Employers

The map shows at a glance the qualifications, their various levels, and clarifies the value of each qualification. It shows employers what their employees need to attain to arrive at certain levels of education and training and it provides a useful tool around which they can develop their schemes of service.

4.5. Implications for Professional Organizations

Organizations regrouping professionals have a guide from which they can develop qualifications in their own area. However, in the development of standards for qualification, these organisations have a role to play in deciding with the SQA the professional competencies that should be included in the qualification. Similarly, professional organisations will need to assist the SQA in accrediting training providers.

Annex:

Qualifications Map

NQF level	Band	Qualification type	Level descriptors			
			Degree of complexity of tasks	Reasoning and problem solving	Knowledge	Autonomy and responsibility
10	Higher Education and Training	PhD, Post-Doctorate	<p>Carry out processes that: require originality and mastery in the application of in-depth and specialized knowledge</p> <p>involve substantial contribution to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches in research and enquiry in the field of study</p> <p>demonstrate initiative and employ a wide range of advanced research skills applied to complex tasks in highly specialized contexts</p>	<p>Generate new knowledge and applications through conceptualizing, designing and implementing a research project at the forefront of the field of study</p> <p>Make sound judgement on and provide new insights into complex issues based on systematic and supported analysis in specialist fields involving aspects of uncertainty</p> <p>Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in the context of consultation and dissemination of new findings to specialist and non-specialist audiences</p>	<p>Demonstrate evidence of creating and interpreting new knowledge based on original and advanced research at the forefront of the field of study, to satisfy peer review and merit publication</p> <p>Analyze and synthesize comprehensively and critically a substantial body of knowledge in the field of study in order to elicit and establish relationships between the elements of the subject in the area of research</p> <p>Conceive, write, critically analyse, discuss, compare specialized texts, propose new insights into the field of study and generate new knowledge</p> <p>Understand the limits of the knowledge and the necessity for further research and continuous development in the field of study</p>	<p>Operate in accordance with broad development or strategic plan and budget</p> <p>in a completely self directed manner</p> <p>with full responsibility and accountability for all aspects of advanced research work and including management of resources and supervision of others</p>
9		Master, Post Graduate	<p>Carry out processes that: require a measure of originality and mastery in the application of in-depth and specialized and/or broad knowledge</p> <p>Involve the use of established techniques of research and enquiry, to internationally recognized standards, to create and interpret knowledge in the field of study</p>	<p>Evaluate critically the appropriateness of different problem solving approaches, the underpinning methodologies, and where appropriate, propose new hypotheses or solutions</p> <p>Make sound judgement on complex issues based on systematic and innovative analysis in contexts involving aspects of uncertainty</p>	<p>Demonstrate evidence of critical and systematic understanding of knowledge and current problems and/or insights at the forefront of their field of study or area of specialization</p> <p>Analyze and synthesize comprehensively and critically current research and advanced scholarship in the field of study</p>	<p>Operate in accordance with broad development or strategic plan and budget</p> <p>in a completely self directed manner</p> <p>with responsibility and broad ranging accountability for management of resources and supervision of others</p>

			require the application of a wide range of skills applied to tasks in highly varied and/or highly specialized contexts	Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in the context of consultative and/or supervisory role	Conceive, write, critically analyse, discuss, compare specialized texts, propose new insights into the field of study and possibly generate new knowledge Understand limits of the knowledge and the necessity for further research and continuous development in the field of study	
8		Post Graduate	Carry out processes that: require a mastery in the application of in-depth and specialized knowledge Involve the development and adaptation of procedures to specific and professional context in the field of study require the application and the consolidation of a wide range of skills applied to tasks in highly specialized contexts.	Evaluate critically the appropriateness of different problem solving approaches and where appropriate, propose a range of solutions Make sound judgement on complex issues based on systematic analysis in specialized contexts involving aspects of uncertainty Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in the context of consultative and/or supervisory role	Demonstrate knowledge and intellectual independence in the critical and systematic understanding of ideas, principles and concepts of their area of specialization Analyze and synthesize critically current research and advanced scholarship in the field of study Conceive, write, critically analyse, discuss and compare specialized texts Understand limits of the knowledge acquired, its influence on analysis and interpretation and explore lines of research	Operate in accordance with broad development or strategic plan and budget Within a context of broad autonomy with responsibility and broad ranging accountability for management of resources and supervision of others
7		Degree	Carry out processes that: require self-directed application of knowledge with substantial depth in some areas involve the development and adaptation of standard procedures to specific context in the field of study require the application of a range of technical and other skills to tasks in both varied and highly specific contexts	Evaluate critically the appropriateness of different problem solving approaches in the field of study Provide appropriate responses to new situations requiring synthesis and evaluation of heterogenous data in contexts involving aspects of uncertainty Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in the context of supervisory and collaborative role	Demonstrate knowledge and intellectual independence in the critical understanding of ideas, principles and concepts of the field of study, and of area of specialization Analyze, synthesize and evaluate rigorously a wide range of information including consideration of areas of uncertainty Conceive, write, critically analyse, discuss and compare specialized texts	Involved in the planning, resourcing, managing processes and guiding or supervising the work of others within a context of broad autonomy with complete accountability for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and /or group outcomes

					Understand the limits of the knowledge acquired and its influence on analysis and interpretation	
6	Further Education and Training	Advanced National Diploma	Carry out processes that: require a command of highly specialised technical or academic, and basic research skills across a particular branch of a field of study involve the application of a full range of procedures in the branch of study are employed in highly variable routine and non-routine contexts	Propose appropriate responses to resolve given or contextual abstract problems Provide adequate responses to unfamiliar situation requiring synthesis and consideration of heterogeneous data Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in the context of professional consultation	Demonstrate specialised knowledge with depth in a particular branch of a discipline Analyse, reformat and evaluate a wide range of information Conceive, write and discuss specialised texts Understand and interpret fundamental and highly technical information in a particular field of study	Involved in planning, resourcing and managing processes within broad parameters and functions with responsibility for determining, achieving and evaluating personal and / or group outcomes
5		National Diploma	Carry out processes that: require a wide range of specialized technical and/or academic skills involve a wide choice of standard and non-standard procedures are employed in a variety of routine and non-routine contexts	Research, adapt and implement innovative and creative processes Determine appropriate methods and procedures in response to a range of concrete problems and with reference to some theoretical concepts Demonstrate interpersonal communication skills in order to train or supervise	Employ broad knowledge base with substantial depth in some areas Analyse and interpret a wide range of data and make informed judgement Prepare, present and discuss oral and/or written reports Understand and interpret relatively complex technical information	Involved in activities with full responsibility for the nature, quantity and quality of outcomes under broad guidance with possible responsibility for the achievement of group outcomes with some responsibility for the supervision of others
4		Advanced National Certificate	Carry out processes that: cover a range of well developed technical and/or academic skills involve a significant choice of procedures are executed within a range of familiar contexts	Use a range of known responses to solve familiar problems Have a range of sometimes innovative responses to concrete but often unfamiliar problems Demonstrate interpersonal skills in order to communicate information, to convince or care for others	Employ broad knowledge base incorporating some theoretical concepts Analyse and interpret information and make informed judgement Prepare oral and written reports on work done or on incidents Understand working instructions and simple technical documents	Involved in directed activities, with some autonomy under general supervision with some responsibility for the quantity and quality of output for self and others with possible responsibility for supervising others
3		National Certificate	Carry out processes that: cover a range of specialized technical skills in a precise field of study	Apply procedures and/or techniques in response to precise instructions in	Employ basic operational knowledge	Involved in directed activities under general supervision and

			involve repetitive and familiar procedures are executed within closely defined parameters	order to obtain expected results Propose new solutions, adjustments and adaptations Exchange factual information	Refer to readily available information Use known solution to familiar problems Fill in working forms or other relevant formats Understand working instructions	quality control with limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of their work with no responsibility for guiding others
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4	General Education	Advanced level	Carry out processes that: deal with advanced hypothetical propositions which will be directly linked to a concern, topic or theme require developed abstract thinking skills to solve complex problems Involve a wide range of procedures, often in non -standard combinations	Demonstrate the ability to gain and apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding at a detailed level Show evidence of the ability to analyze, synthesize a range of data and to comprehend material of reasonably complex nature Determine the proper methods and procedures to respond to a variety of problems Articulate the results of their study and research clearly, accurately, and in a balanced and rational manner	Demonstrate wide -ranging understanding of the subject(s) at hand but with in depth knowledge of certain areas Prepare oral and written essays with coherency on research done	Involves a high degree of independent learning, but will often require input or guidance from others to complete of tasks Displays qualities and transferable skills useful in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility and judgement
		Secondary	Carry out processes that: deal with hypothetical propositions involving abstract thinking and requires the combination of elements in a systematic way	Apply procedures and/or techniques related to language, mathematical, ICT, scientific, historical, socio-cultural and environmental domains Transfer skills in multiple contexts according to set procedures and use them to learn more effectively Apply critical and creative thinking to solve problems Communicate information, instructions, ideas and feelings in a	Acquire broad-based knowledge and skills and develop desirable attitudes, to provide the basis for independent and future learning, and application of learning.	Involved in directed learning under guided autonomy and with close supervision with limited responsibility aiming towards increased autonomy by taking positions

				range of different cultural, language and social contexts		
1		Primary	Carry out processes at a concrete (hands-on) level based on familiar content and involving logical groupings	Apply basic procedures and techniques related to language, mathematical, ICT, scientific, historical, socio-cultural and environmental domains Apply repetitive and other learning skills to instill sound elementary knowledge, attitudes and values Demonstrate basic communication skills to inform, recall and express facts, ideas, views, opinions and feelings	Acquire basic, broad-based knowledge and skills (operational literacy in terms of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) and develop desirable attitudes and values.	Involved in basic directed learning under continuous guidance with close supervision with limited responsibility and autonomy

