Kingdom of Eswatini

Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

August 2020

Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

"To facilitate development, classification, comparison and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies".

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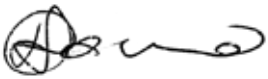
FOREWORD

The Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini continues to underscore the critical role of the Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDS) in contributing to the attainment of shared growth and enhanced quality of life for all Emaswati. It is in this regard that the Ministry of Education and Training has continuously engaged in improvements in the sector to ensure that the system does not merely churn out certificate holders but results in proper human capital development.

In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Training conducted a comprehensive sector analysis with the view to assess the sector's adequacy to support sustained economic growth and development. The analysis was necessitated by the urgent need to re-align the education, training and skills development system so that it produces adequate development-relevant skills to ensure enhanced economic growth and improved standards of living for the entire nation. It became clear that without relevant knowledge and skills, the country cannot compete its way into the modern and knowledge-based global world. One of the key recommendations of the analysis was the development of the National Qualifications Framework.

The establishment of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) is thus a conscious effort by the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini to address an array of challenges that beset the country's ETSDS, including non-responsiveness of education and training to industry and labour market needs, fragmentation within the education and training sector, poor credibility and quality of existing qualifications and training programmes and lack of opportunities for lifelong learning. The Framework will serve as a blueprint for developing education and training; and will ensure that the country's qualifications are comparable and compatible. It will promote transparency of qualifications; and facilitate mobility and progression of learners within the education, training and skills development system.

The ESQF embraces learning outcomes, a concept defined in terms of what a learner is expected to know, understand and can do at the end of a learning sequence. It will therefore provide the basis for development of courses and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits. The adoption of learning outcomes in the design of curricula is expected to facilitate production of relevant graduates that are equipped with knowledge, skills and competences to become versatile and responsible people.



Lady Howard Mabuza
Honourable Minister for Education and Training

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	-	Adult Basic Education and Training
ECE	-	Early Childhood Education
ETSDS	-	Education, Training and Skills Development Sector
ESQF	-	Eswatini Qualifications Framework
NQF	-	National Qualifications Framework
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	-	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
TQF	-	Transnational Qualifications Framework
TVET	-	Technical Vocational Education and Training
EGCSE	-	Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Background

Eswatini is cognisant of the importance of education and skills development in supporting national development aspirations and goals, which include accelerated growth and global competitiveness. It accepts that education and skills development, as embraced in human capital development, is a critical pillar for growth, poverty eradication and social cohesion. The mission of the Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDS) therefore is:

> "To provide relevant, quality and affordable education and training opportunities for the entire populace of the Kingdom of Eswatini in order to develop all positive aspects of life for self-reliance, social and economic development and global competitiveness".

The vision is:

> "Attainment of equality in educational opportunities for all pupils of school going age and adults irrespective of their socio economic background, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their productive capacity, thus improving the quality of their lives."

1.1.1 Rationale for the development of Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

The decision to develop the Eswatini Qualifications Framework is driven by a number of factors including:

- Poor internal relevance – poor vertical and horizontal articulation of programmes limit the pathway arrangements required to facilitate trainee movement across levels of TVET, and between TVET and higher education.
- Poor credibility and quality of existing qualifications and training programs – There is a need to provide a stronger basis for the understanding, comparison and recognition of national and foreign qualifications, thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents and learners of the value of qualifications. This will be achieved by the development of a set

of levels of learning outcomes and competencies to be achieved and assign qualifications to the levels.

- Lack of coherence and fragmented nature of qualifications systems – There is need to address the lack of consistency and reliability among qualifications.
- The need for recognition of non-formal acquired skills and facilitation of their integration into the formal system. Lifelong learning is a vital component in the development and utilization of human capital, hence the need to recognize, validate and accredit non formal learning in the national qualifications framework. More so, because formal learning is not sufficient to facilitate and utilize the full human potential of any society.

The above challenges are being addressed by the Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) which should strengthen the transparency of qualifications and clarify the mutual relations, vertically and horizontally, to enhance communication on qualifications between education and the labour market.

1.2 Contextualizing the ESQF

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have increasingly become a major international trend in communicating, transforming or reforming national education and training systems since the late 1990s. Although NQFs were seen as being predominantly an Anglophone initiative, non-English speaking countries have adopted them. There are currently over 147 countries implementing NQF development, classification and recognition of skills knowledge and competencies. NQFs are a remarkable feature in the world and particularly Southern Africa.

1.2.1 The Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF)

As part of the national development reform agenda, Eswatini wishes to accelerate its growth and global competitiveness through a knowledge and technology driven economy. Central to this reform is the skilled liSwati.

There is a compelling case for the current Education, Training and Skills Development Sector (ETSDS) to be realigned and modified in order to adequately supply the quality, mix and threshold of skills required for the knowledge and technology driven growth of the economy.

The ESQF is a useful tool in the reform and transformation of the ETSDS. The transformation within the ETSDS enables Eswatini to address key weaknesses such as poor quality and missing standards, low and inequitable access, especially beyond primary education, doubtful education relevance, articulation blockages, insufficient delivery capacity as well as inadequate preparation for lifelong learning.

The Eswatini Qualifications Framework is defined as an instrument to facilitate development, classification, comparison and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a range of agreed levels. It is an approach of arranging existing and new qualifications using learning outcomes.

1.2.2 Purpose of Developing Eswatini Qualifications Framework

The purpose for the development of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework is twofold:

a. Promoting Lifelong Learning
- Improving understanding of learning and qualifications, and how they relate to each other.
- Improving access to education and training.
- Making progression routes easier and clearer thus improving learner and career mobility.
- Increasing scope for recognition of prior learning.

b. Quality Assurance and Recognition
- Ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived industry and socio-economic needs.
- Ensuring compatibility of the same qualification offered by different institutions.
- Ensuring that education and training standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and applied consistently.
- Maintaining international comparability of standards, especially in the Southern African context, to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility;

1.2.3 Guiding Principles of the ESQF

This policy is predicated on the following guiding principles and values:

Integration: forming part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training.

Relevance: remaining responsive and appropriate to national development needs.

Credibility: to have national and international value and acceptance.

Coherence: working within a consistent framework of principles and certification.

Flexibility: allowing multiple pathways to the same learning ends.

Standards: being expressed in terms of nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes.

Legitimacy: providing for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and coordination of standards and qualifications.

Access: providing ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression.

Articulation: a provision to learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system.

Progression: ensuring that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system.

Portability: to enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another.

Recognition of Prior Learning: an assessment process to evaluate learning outcomes that have already been achieved, formally or informally, through work, life experience or other activities. Prior learning may allow entry to qualifications or provide credits towards achieving a qualification.

Guidance: providing counselling for learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognized standards for educators and trainers.

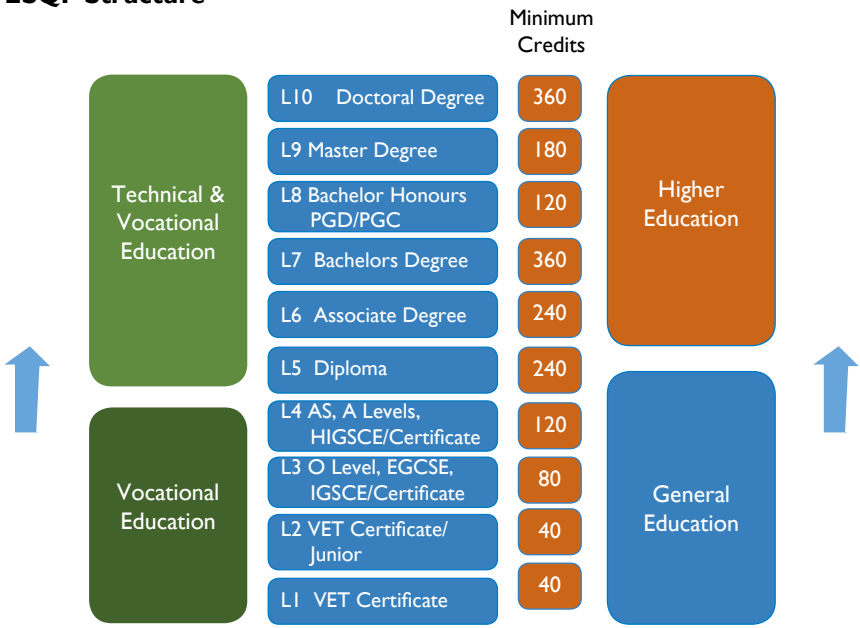
Clarity: The framework should be clear and comprehensible to all stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Structure of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework

The ESQF has ten levels, seven of which are situated at undergraduate level and three are at postgraduate level. The structure has been benchmarked against other international and regional structures such as the SADCQF and the Commonwealth of Learning Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). The 10 levels encompass the whole education sector and ensures comparability and transparency of qualifications in different fields and learning areas. Each level represents groupings of qualifications sharing similar characteristics as described by the level descriptors.

ESQF Structure



Each level represents the complexity of the qualifications from the most basic to the most complex incrementally from levels one to ten. Each qualification at a given level has a generic name regardless of where the qualification was obtained. Such generic titles make it possible for all qualifications that are registered on the framework to have parity of esteem.

2.2 ESQF Level Descriptors

Level descriptors are statements describing the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the ESQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that individuals at a given level should possess or be able to demonstrate on achieving the qualification.

In formulating the ESQF level descriptors, the following principles have been embraced:

- Level descriptors are broad, generic, qualitative statements of learning outcomes that will be achieved at a specific level of the qualifications framework.

- Level descriptors take account of different types of learning at the same level, including knowledge and understanding, skills and wider personal and professional competencies.

- Levels are not intrinsically related to the period of study.

- Level descriptors are intended to integrate academic, technical-vocational education and training (TVET) and professional aspects of learning and apply to all learning contexts (class work, practical work, work-based learning).

- Level descriptors are not intended to be prescriptive but rather flexible enough to provide a guideline to practitioners involved in the design and delivery of the curriculum for any field of study.

- Level descriptors are developed with the intention that the curriculum specialist will use his/her professional expertise to translate them into his/her own field of study.

- The level descriptors may be used to aid the assessment of claims for recognition of prior learning.

- Level descriptors are designed to act as a guide to locate a qualification (and its associated learning programmes) at the appropriate level on the ESQF.

- Level descriptors are formulated to help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the ESQF.

Table 1: ESQF Level Descriptors

Level 10		
Knowledge	• To create a new, systematic and logical knowledge base through in-depth and original research and scholarship.	• *Doctoral Degree*
Skills	• To apply innovative methods, technologies and interventions to solving real-world and theoretical problems; • To produce and defend independent, in-depth and publishable work.	
Personal Attributes	• To demonstrate independence of thought and action; • To take full responsibility for their own work; to effectively manage, supervise or oversee the work of others; • To portray confidence in communicating and leading research in their area of expertise; • To act professional within their field of work; work in ways which are reflective, critical and based on evidence.	
Level 9		
Knowledge	• To defend a position based upon advanced knowledge and understanding of a particular discipline; • To apply appropriate methods and techniques to collect new evidence, analyse existing evidence, or critique other scholarly work in a systematic way; • To advance the boundaries of knowledge in a creative way, and pioneer entrepreneurship.	• *Master's Degree*

Level 9		
Skills	• To communicate and present research findings to a wider and professional audience; • To develop and defend original coherent and compelling arguments; • To design and plan rigorous and systematic projects based upon ethical principles.	• *Master's Degree*
Personal Attributes	• To make autonomous and ethical decisions; to effectively manage their time and other resources; ' • To demonstrate initiative and innovation in a wide range of contexts; • To demonstrate creativity and initiative in their area of expertise.	
Level 8		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate a critical understanding of the relevant theories, methodologies, and methods existing at the forefront of their discipline; • To critically and systematically analyse, evaluate, and engage with new and more complex concepts that will extend and replicate knowledge; • To possess a basic knowledge of innovation and entrepreneurship.	• *Professional Degree,* • *Bachelor Honours* • *Post Graduate Certificate* • *Post Graduate Diploma*
Skills	• To generate hypothesis; analyse and evaluate problems; work in teams; present and communicate research findings through the interrogation of multiple sources of knowledge; • To apply knowledge and skills to solving abstract and complex problems; to acquire and apply intermediary entrepreneurial skills.	

Level 8		
Personal Attributes	• To be able to assume a leadership role; • To demonstrate a basic understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship; • To be autonomous learners; • To be reflective and self-critical; • To take responsibility for their own actions and work; • To undertake professional work within their given discipline.	
Level 7		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate understanding of the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located and has knowledge of current developments in the area of study or work. • To demonstrate clear conceptualisation of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work. • To demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issue in the field of study and between different fields.	• *Bachelor's Degree*
Skills	• To demonstrate ability to design and manage processes, can use specialised skills to conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors with a developed ability to undertake research, development of strategic activities to inform or produce change in the area of work or study.	
Personal Attributes	• To develop and communicate ideas, opinions and informed arguments using appropriate academic, professional or occupational discourse. • Accountable for own work, decision-making and use of resources. • Limited responsibility for decisions and actions of others in varied and/or unfamiliar contexts.	

Level 6		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate acquired specialist knowledge of an area of work or study to enable the use of an individual's own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations in a field. • To demonstrate the achievement of a high level of professional knowledge and a critical understanding of theories and principles, and how that knowledge relates to other fields/ disciplines/ practices.	• *Associate Degree*
Skills	• To demonstrates ability to use specialised skills and tools to address unfamiliar situations that involve many interacting factors using appropriate methodologies and approaches. • To design and undertake research, development of strategic activities to inform or produce change in the area of work or study. • To evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	
Personal Attributes	• To manage processes and work with a large degree of accountability for personal and group outcomes; • To clearly communicating ideas, challenges and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of relevant techniques; • To evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications.	

Level 5		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate an understanding of concepts, principles, fact and theories within a specified field, discipline and practise. • To apply broad theoretic and practical knowledge that is often specialised within a field. • To analyze, categorize, classify information to construct logical and coherent argument • To show awareness of the knowledge base.	• *Diploma* • *Technician*
Skills	• To demonstrate the ability to identify, evaluate and solve undefined, routine, new problems within a known context. • To apply solutions based on relevant evidence and procedures or other forms of explanations appropriate to the field, discipline or practice, demonstrating an understanding of consequences.	
Personal Attributes	• To manage projects with limited supervision that require problem solving where there are many factors some of which can lead to unforeseen changes. • To convey ideas in a reliable, accurate, and coherent manner to peers, supervisors and clients using appropriate conventions. • To express a comprehensive internalised personal world view reflecting engagement with others. • To formulate responses to abstract and concrete problems. • To demonstrate experience of operational interactions within a familiar field. • To make judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues.	

Level 4		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate advanced knowledge in specialised and emerging situations to make informed judgements. • To understand key concepts, terms, rules and established principles and theories in one or more fields or disciplines.	• *Advanced Subsidiary* • *Advanced Level* • *HIGCSE* • *Artisan* • *Grade I trade test*
Skills	• To apply strategic approaches to tasks that arise in work and using expert sources of information. • To use technology to solve existing and emerging situations.	
Personal Attributes	• To demonstrate accountability and responsibility in work/ learning situations. • To show proactivity and reliability in performance of tasks.	
Level 3		
Knowledge	• To demonstrate ability to understand and apply theoretical and technical knowledge of key concepts to perform tasks and solve problems within given parameters. • To have an understanding of solutions to a limited range of predictable problems.	• *Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE)* • *International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)* • *Grade 2 Trade Certificate*
Skills	• To apply a range of methods, tools and materials to complete routine activities.	
Personal Attributes	• To complete tasks under moderate supervision in stable contexts. • To demonstrate ability to perform tasks in a team. • To demonstrate ability to adhere to organisational values.	

Level 2		
Knowledge	• To recall and apply basic practical and educational knowledge of a defined area of learning / work.	• *Handyman/ semiskilled* • *Basic capacity to operate in a specialised skills area* • *Grade 3 Trade Certificate*
Skills	• To apply basic skills to execute tasks involving known routines and procedures under maximum supervision.	
Personal Attributes	• To perform tasks in a well-defined and supervised environment. • To demonstrate limited autonomy in execution of tasks.	
Level 1		
Knowledge	• To recall basic knowledge in well-defined and familiar contexts.	• *Eswatini Primary Certificate (EPC)* • *Basic literacy e.g. learners who have completed Sebenta* • *Other basic foundation programmes incorporating basic literacy and numeracy.*
Skills	• To apply numeracy and literacy skills to carry out tasks.	
Personal Attributes	• To demonstrate ability to understand, follow instructions and be able to function as a team member in learning and work environment.	

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Qualification Titles

Three broad types of qualifications are able to be placed on the ESQF:

- Degrees
- Diplomas
- Certificates

The qualification types are used to encourage flexibility and the accurate assignment to a level. Each qualification on the ESQF describes what a learner needs to know or what they must be able to do. The qualification titles will allow for the comparability and easy understanding of qualifications, as well as the improved international recognition of qualifications.

Each qualification on the ESQF will have a statement of learning outcomes. This includes statements about:

- What the qualification represents in terms of the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes; and
- The components of the qualification which, in their combination, make up the complete qualification.

3.1.1 Certificate

Certificates may be used in a wide range of contexts across all levels up to and including Level 7, and are often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates at ESQF Levels 1 and 2 have a minimum credit requirement of 40 credits. The ESQF Level 4 certificate has a minimum credit requirement of 120 credits. Entry to the ESQF Level 4 is normally from a Secondary Certificate or from the completion of a relevant qualification from at least Level 3. ESQF Level 4 certificate may be used in a wide range of contexts and is often used to prepare candidates for both employment and further education and training. Certificates awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed graduate or post-graduate.

3.1.2 Diploma

A Diploma is a qualification that commonly has a wider theoretical base than a certificate and more specialised, technical, professional or managerial competencies. Diplomas often prepare learners for self-directed application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. These qualifications often build on prior qualifications or experience and recognise capacity for initiative and judgment across a broad range of educational and vocational areas, and in technical, professional, and/or management roles. A Diploma must have at least 240 credits contributing to the qualification at Level 5. Diploma awarded at Level 6 may be termed advanced or higher. Diplomas awarded beyond Level 7 may be termed Graduate or Postgraduate.

3.1.3 Associate Degree or Foundation Degree

An Associate or Foundation Degree is a programme designed to recognise and facilitate students' successful progression to the full degree or directly to employment. These degrees focus on learning within a work context, underpinned by both vocational and academic understanding, and enable learners to demonstrate learning outcomes that are explicitly relevant to employment and professional requirements. The Associate and Foundation Degree will have at least 240 credits of which at least 90 credits will match the Level 6 descriptor.

3.1.4 Bachelor's Degree

A Bachelor's Degree is a systematic, research-based, coherent, introduction to the knowledge, ideas, principles, concepts, research methods and to the analytical and problem-solving techniques of a recognised major subject or subjects. A programme leading to this qualification usually involves major studies in which significant knowledge is available. Programme content is taken to a significant depth and progressively developed to a high level that can provide a basis for post-graduate study and professional careers. A Bachelor Degree requires a minimum of 360 credits. Successful completion of L5 and L6 can contribute a maximum of 120 and 240 credits, respectively towards achieving a L7 qualification. A programme of study leading to a Bachelor Degree qualification builds upon prior study, work or experience and is open to those who have met the specified entrance requirements.

3.1.5 Bachelor's Degree with Honours / Professional Degree

A Bachelor's Degree with Honours may be awarded to recognise advanced or distinguished study of a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree. This may occur by recognising outstanding achievement in a 480 credit (or more) Bachelor's Degree especially in relation to work of a research nature (typically at Level 8); or achieving at least 120 credits at level 8 following a Level 7 Bachelor's Degree (either as part of an integrated Honours degree or as a separate qualification).

3.1.6 Master's Degree

A Master's Degree is normally designed to extend the principal subject or subjects of the qualifying degree or may build on relevant knowledge and skills derived from advanced occupational experience. A Master's Degree contains a significant element of supervised research, normally embodied in a thesis, dissertation or substantial research paper. The Master's Degree requires a minimum of 240 credits, with at least 120 matching the Level 9 descriptor. Where the Master's Degree builds upon a four year (or longer) Bachelor's Degree, it can be fewer than 240 credits, but no fewer than 180 credits. Masters Degrees usually build on undergraduate degrees, Bachelor with Honours Degrees or Postgraduate Diplomas. Masters Degrees also build on extensive professional experience of an appropriate kind.

Providers of courses leading to Masters Degrees are responsible for establishing entry requirements. Nevertheless, the minimum entry qualification for a 180 to 240 credit Master's Degree is normally a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent. For a Master's Degree of fewer than 240 credits, the minimum entry qualification is normally a Bachelor's Degree with Honours or a Postgraduate Diploma. Admission as a candidate for a Master's Degree is based on the evaluation of documentary evidence (including the academic record) of the applicant's ability to undertake postgraduate study in a specialist field of enquiry or professional practice. The candidate must have attained, through formal study, professional or other experience, a high order of knowledge about the principal subject(s), and have demonstrated interest in, and an aptitude for, scholarship.

A person who holds a Bachelor's Degree may be able to enroll for a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma or Master's Degree. An applicant who holds either a Bachelor's Degree with Honours, or a Postgraduate Certificate,

or Diploma may be exempted from all or some of the taught courses. A person who holds a Master's Degree which includes a substantial component of research may be considered for admission to a programme of advanced study and/or original research leading to a Doctoral Degree.

3.1.7 Doctoral Degree

The Doctoral Degree recognises a substantial original contribution to knowledge in the form of new knowledge or significant and original adaptation, application and interpretation of existing knowledge. A Doctoral Degree is a qualification that is at a significantly higher level than the Master's Degree, reflecting, independent, scholarly work. The Doctoral programme will be equivalent to a minimum of 3 years of full-time study, or 360 credits matching the Level 10 descriptor.

Typical Doctoral programs and entry pathways are:

- The research doctorate, which is primarily achieved through supervised research, with entry from a research or part-research Master's Degree, or a Bachelor with Honours Degree (First or Second Class, upper division); and
- The professional doctorate, which may be undertaken through varying combinations of coursework and research, with entry from a combined research and coursework Master's Degree, a Bachelor with Honours Degree (First or Second Class, upper division) or equivalent, and requires significant professional practice either prior to and/or as part of the program.

3.2 Learning Outcome

A learning outcome is a statement on what a learner should understand and can do upon completion of a learning sequence or period of study.

3.3 Credits

A credit is a "currency" providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in notional hours at a given level. It is awarded for learning that has been achieved and verified through reliable and valid assessment. In most national and regional systems and notably within SADC and the Commonwealth one credit equates 10 notional hours of learning at the appropriate level.

3.3.1 Credit Values

Credit values are commonly used as an accepted mechanism that recognises the quantum of learning for a qualification. This mechanism acts as a form of currency in that it is the medium of exchange when learners transfer their attainment from one qualification to another under 'credit' transfer arrangements. There is a growing acceptance of an international credit value where one credit represents about 10 hours of notional learning time.

3.3.2 Scope of Learning

Learning time should include all relevant learning activities that contribute to the attainment of the outcomes of learning. Such activities could include:

- Formal, directed learning including classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials
- Practical work in laboratories or at other locations
- Information retrieval, e.g. from libraries or through the Web
- Self-directed study, such as private study, revision, remedial work
- Work-based activities that lead to formal assessment
- Practice – gaining, applying and refining skills
- Undertaking all forms of assessment, and
- Counselling, mentoring, reflection.

3.2.3 Notional Learning

Learning time is notional as it is not linked to any one individual learner. A learner who achieves the required performances in more time than anticipated for the 'average learner' will not receive more credits – they will only receive that number of credits deemed appropriate by the qualification developer or national standard setter. Similarly, a learner who achieves the requirements in less time than the average learner will not be awarded less credits – they will receive the stated credits.

3.4 Recognition of Prior Learning

Specific arrangements will be made for the assessment and accreditation of skills and competencies people acquired outside of the school system. People can acquire skills and competences in different ways, by following a learning programme, but also through experience in their work and daily life. For those who feel that they master skills and can demonstrate competencies in a certain field it should be possible that they can come forward and require to be assessed against the standards as described in the qualifications framework.

CHAPTER 4

The Eswatini National Qualifications Framework and Quality Assurance

4.1 Introduction

The ESQF is one essential component for assuring the quality of Education, Training and skills development in Eswatini. Quality assurance entails a system of continuously assessing the quality of education, training and skills development to ensure credibility of graduates. The Eswatini Qualifications Framework and quality assurance system create rich, diverse and lifelong opportunities for the individual citizen by preparing citizens for work in an increasingly knowledge-based, technology-driven and skills dependant labour market that help Eswatini to deliver jobs and growth in a rapidly changing and highly competitive global environment.

It is essential that the quality assurance system is regulated, monitored and continuously improved. The Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC) has the overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Higher Education Institutions need to develop their own internal quality assurance (IQA) policies and procedures.

4.2 The Components of Quality Assurance

The three key components for assuring the quality of the educational and training provision are level descriptors, subject standards or benchmarks and programme specifications.

Level descriptors are generic and thus are high level descriptions of what outcomes are expected on achieving a given qualification. The ESQF provides these high-level generic descriptors for each qualification level (see Chapter 2). It is important that providers, whether national, regional or international, can demonstrate that their qualifications satisfy these generic descriptions thus ensuring a level of equivalence within and between levels. A L7 qualification, for example, should be equivalent regardless of the provider or their location.

Subject standards or benchmarks are the responsibility of ESHEC and they must be agreed upon among all stakeholders. They should also take cognisance of regional or international subject standards. Whilst level descriptors describe what outcomes are expected of a qualification level (e.g. Bachelor degree attributes), subject standards describe the intended learning outcomes of a subject or domain within a qualification. For example, a subject standard would describe a common set of learning outcomes expected of a student studying for a Chemistry degree. Subject standards or benchmark statements are necessary to ensure that there is compatibility or equivalence at the subject level within a qualification (i.e. a chemistry graduate from one institution should be equivalent to a chemistry graduate from another institution).

Programme specifications are at the next level of granularity. These are written by each provider or an accredited third party for each of the programmes it offers. The programme specifications set out the particular characteristics of the programme and draw upon both the generic expectations of the qualification framework and the specifics of any relevant benchmark statement(s). Programme specifications not only address what must be taught but how it will be taught. It is in the area of teaching and learning methods that institutions can exercise considerable freedom and flexibility to reflect their resources, students' and teachers' abilities.

4.3 Accreditation, Validation and QA Compliance

For the ESQF to be effective; and to assure and enhance the quality of the Kingdom's education and training providers, it requires evidence that the framework levels, subject standards and programme specifications are valid, providers are accredited, and that all parties are in compliance with the required QA policies and procedures.

Validation is a QA process to ensure that qualifications, subject standards and programme specifications are consistent, accurate, and relevant. Most validation processes in QA involve some form of internal or external review/consultation. For example, to ensure the validity of the level descriptors, drafts were drawn up following stakeholder consultations and benchmarking activities, and have been written and reviewed by internal experts. A similar process will be followed for subject standards and programme specifications.

Accreditation is a process to ensure that education and training providers meet a set of pre-specified quality standards. It is a judgment about the quality of the provider or institution. An accredited provider is then licensed, usually for a fixed period, to provide training and education at a specified qualification level (e.g. universities providing degree programmes).

Compliance is a process of demonstrating that the required QA policies and procedures exist and are being correctly followed. The process usually involves reviews of documentation, interviews with key stakeholders, and observation of practices (e.g. teaching). Providers, who are not compliant, can lose their accreditation.

The ESQF is, therefore, the key starting point and driver for all education and training programmes. It provides an external reference point when considering a provider's approach to the management and security of academic standards of its awards and the quality of its provision.

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