**Maldives National Qualifications Framework**

### Introduction

That our human resource is the best asset of the country has been said oftentimes to the extent of being hackneyed. Limited by its physical resources and economic power, we must look to the skills and knowledge of our people to undergird our economic and social development. More and more people with relevant skills will become critical to sustain the strides of development as knowledge and intellectual skills become more important than manual labour in a technological era.

As education grows in importance, so does the way we recognise that certain learning outcomes have been reached. Qualifications provide such recognition of a person’s skills and learning. A qualification framework ensures that the education achieved is easily understood by the students, employers and education providers. This paper outlines such a framework developed by reflecting on the local situations and overseas developments. The focus of the paper is on qualifications, that is, recognition of achievement, rather than teaching, learning and assessment.

### Rationale

As the school-leaving population increases, employers are using qualifications to identify candidates for various jobs. As a result, qualifications are being sought by more and more people. Concurrently, a growing number of education providers advertise diverse courses, some of which are of very good standard, while others are of questionable standing. In fact, Maldives is situated in a sea of varying academic standards, with some regional university degrees being unacceptable across the national border. As higher education becomes a mass phenomenon and universities are forced to self-fund an increasing proportion of their expenditure, candidates are being offered qualifications of dubious value. The situation is likely to get worse in the future.

In the Maldives, the independent growth of post-secondary institutes, have led to a confusion of nomenclature regarding qualifications. For example, one institute may offer a diploma course which involves four years of full-time study after O Levels. Another

**National Qualifications Framework**

Preschool

Grade 1

Grade 2

Grade 3

Grade 4

Grade 5

Grade 6

Grade 7

Compulsory Schooling

Grade 8

Grade 9

Grade 11

Grade 10

Grade 12

Vocational education in schools

“Bridging”, non-formal, condensed programmes

National Certificate

Associate Diploma

National Diploma

Advanced Diploma

Foundation Studies

Associate Diploma

National Diploma

Associate Degree

First Degree

Graduate Diploma

Second Degree

Doctorate

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## SECONDARY

## PRIMARY

## HIGHER

## EDUCATION

Advanced Cert’ate

Advanced Cert’ate

National Certificate

institute may offer a two-year diploma after O Levels. Certificates are also offered after various periods of study. In other words, there is a need to harmonise the qualifications offered by various institutes.

The past ten years have seen the growth of private educational institutions offering various technical courses to the public. It is likely that in the future these private institutions will play an important role in the overall development of the national technical and educational skills. It is, therefore, useful to recognize some of their qualifications in a national framework for the government may not be able to shoulder the skilling of the population alone.

### Objectives

The objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is to provide the learners, employers and providers with widely supported and respected qualifications. More specifically, the NQF

* Closely integrates learning and work at all levels
* Rationalises school qualifications, industry and vocational qualifications, and academic qualifications into one single system
* Supports flexible and continuous upgrading of knowledge and skills throughout one’s life
* Encourages equality of respect between vocational and academic qualifications
* Provides a structure in which private education providers can maintain credibility and quality.

### Brief outline of the Framework

In the proposed framework, there are 12 levels of qualifications. Some aspects of vocational education may be taught from Grade-9 onwards. Safety nets have been provided at two stages for those unable to succeed in the formal education system for various reasons. The terms in the Vocational and Higher Education columns will all be “protected” so that non-recognized institutes may not offer them. The lowest qualification is the National Certificate. These and other qualifications may be taken in parts, say three, so that a person may take Part 1 of the National Certificate in Information Technology at one time, and take the remaining parts later. This division increases the flexibility of the courses so that people are encouraged to keep on studying. Up to the Second Degree (masterate), the diagram shows that the qualifications are one academic-year long if taken full-time.

### Benefits

Qualifications recognized within the National Qualifications Framework will be:

* Credible and useful to the employers
* Readily understood by the public
* Able to give students opportunity to advance their learning throughout their lives.

In particular the learners will be assured a qualification that is:

* Formally recognized by the government
* Portable for various other courses the learner may take in the future
* Likely to provide greater choice and flexibility in what, where and how to learn.

For the employers, a national qualification framework would mean:

* Education and training designed in consultation with industry for the industry
* A more skilled and adaptable workforce
* Standards-based training with measurable outcomes

The providers will benefit from a national qualifications framework by being able to

* Cross-credit between sectors and providers
* Expand the range of programmes offered
* Provide training for a nationally-recognized qualification.

For a qualification to be recognized within the NQF, it should meet or exceed a clearly specified *quality* *benchmark.*

### Recognition Criteria

The quality benchmark will include

1. clearly stated outcomes (statements about what students know or can do)
2. assessment criteria which is valid and reliable
3. entry, exit and transfer characteristics of students studying for the qualification.

There should be a common currency for measuring some of the above so that transfer between different learning programmes is easy and flexible. *Credit values* and *levels* are two such currencies used overseas. In the proposed framework, there are 12 levels. The first level is placed at Grade 10 standard.

The bodies recognizing a qualification within the NQF themselves must not be developers or providers of qualifications. For this reason, Maldives College of Higher Education cannot take on the responsibility of approving qualifications in the NQF.

### Recognition of existing qualifications

Qualifications which are currently accredited by various external bodies will be automatically recognized at the appropriate level within the NQF without further assessment.

It is proposed that all qualifications offered by MCHE should be assessed periodically by the body responsible for accreditation of qualifications within the NQF.

### Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of

* periodic assessment of programmes (not institutions)
* quality assurance for guidelines and protection of consumers.

It is proposed that accreditation be facilitative and optional and not mandatory. A charge may be levied for accreditation to cover the lowest cost of the process.

### Accreditation Criteria

Accreditation criteria have been formulated by a number of agencies overseas. Maldives may profit from studying some of them. In general, the following criteria are considered:

*Institutional commitment to its goal:*

* Through specific statement of goals
* Infrastructure facilities for realisation of goals (e.g. student space)
* Existence and satisfactory performance on appropriate instruments.

*Administration*

* Sensitive and responsive to institutional goals
* Climate of mutual support and confidence
* Effective communication between faculty and administration
* Faculty recruitment policies and practices
* Linkages with industry and professional societies
* Adherence to admission guidelines

*Curriculum Objectives*

* Developing competent professionals
* Development of effective written and oral communication
* Development of critical thinking

*Faculty*

* Strength adequate for the programme
* Academic and professional attainments
* Interaction with industry, professional associations, etc.
* Innovation in teaching, methodology and educational strategies
* Student opinion
* Appraisal by peer group

*Students*

* Standards of admission
* Performance in the programme
* Post-institutional performance

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