India Case Study: Educational Sector

Recognition of Prior Learning in community colleges

Background

Studies have shown that one of the biggest challenges in India is to improve the progression possibilities of those who are currently engaged in vocational education and training or have experience in a vocational trade and have limited possibilities to progress to technical education (polytechnics and colleges of engineering) and more generally to higher education (IAMR, 2010; TeamLease, 2007). Presently, only 12 per cent of young people aged 18–24 is enrolled in higher education. National policies aim to enrol 30 per cent of Indian youth in higher education by 2020 (Indiainfoline, 2011).

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) considered the establishment of community colleges to serve as an important bridge between vocational education and training and higher education. Another purpose of a community college is to formalise skills through certification procedures.

Guidelines prepared by the University Grants Commission for community colleges include the recognition of prior skills and learning (UGC, 2012). Community colleges are alternative systems that aim to empower individuals through appropriate skills development, leading to qualifications in the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). Studying at a community college can lead to a two-year advanced diploma or an associate degree and hence the possibility to transfer to an undergraduate college for completion of a degree. Alternatively, it can lead to the students’ direct entry into an occupation or trade with a certificate or diploma by completing the required number of credits (Pillai, 2009). As an illustration, the following types of qualifications are awarded in community colleges at levels five and six of the NSQF.

Table 1: Types of qualifications awarded in community colleges at levels five and six of the NSQF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSQF level</th>
<th>Credits of skill units credits</th>
<th>General education credits</th>
<th>Normal calendar duration criterion)</th>
<th>Exit points/awards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Four semesters</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Two semesters</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>One semester</td>
<td>Advanced Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Three Months</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main activities

Individuals who apply to community colleges need to fulfil the following entry requirements: (1) certification at the lower secondary level (grades 8–10) and higher secondary level (11–12 Grades) or equivalent certification; (2) vocational certificates at levels one to four under the NSQF.

It has been recommended by the MHRD (2012) that institutes such as the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) to conduct Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for those who may want to attend an undergraduate college Bachelor of Arts but are not academically, personally or economically ready to begin their studies in the formal system.

NIOS will conduct RPL against learning outcomes standards at the VET levels (one to four) of the NSQF, so that vocational skills and work experience may be assessed and avenues for certification and lifelong learning are created.

Experienced practitioners are resource persons who conduct assessment of prior learning (UGC, 2012).

To conform to the NSQF, the NIOS and community colleges will collaborate to offer training programmes and courses that are modular, credit-based, career-oriented and relevant to local employers. These courses allow flexibility in entry and exit, and most importantly, are relevant to local employers (Planning Commission, 2013).

To maintain the connection to further education, learning outcomes are linked to curricular structures, as well as occupational standards. Curricula in community colleges are periodically monitored, evaluated and updated in consultation with all stakeholders, particularly the industry, keeping in view their requirements, changes in National Occupational Standards (NOS) and technological developments.

To make curricula in community colleges industry-friendly, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), jointly with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) under the Department of Information and Technology, are contributing to periodic revisions of the curricula in community colleges, creating an enabling environment for the RPL.

New Information Technology (IT) professional courses are also proposed at the lower secondary and upper secondary school, levels three to four, to be aligned with levels five and six of the NSQF and offered through community colleges courses. This has been made possible through collaboration between AICTE and NIELIT. There is also strengthened collaboration between MHRD and the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE). Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) under the jurisdiction of MoLE and polytechnics under the jurisdiction of MHRD are obliged to co-opt a community college to meet skills development at the community level by 2017, i.e., by the end of the current five-year plan in 2017.

Outcomes and ways forward

RPL in community colleges is conducted on the principle that qualifications in the NSQF are relevant, of high quality, trusted and accepted by employers and society in general.

RPL is a tool that matches: (1) the skills profile of people; (2) the competency requirements in the labour market; and (3) the learning outcomes and the curriculum standards without compromising quality (UGC, 2012).
RPL is not seen as an end in itself or a procedure leading to just a certificate; rather it is seen as a means to further educational and personal development.

The demand for developing RPL in alignment with community colleges is increasing. This has to do with the offer of work-based learning programmes through community colleges. Open universities such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU, New Delhi), presently offer 338 programmes in vocational education and training through over 35,000 courses to a cumulative student body of over 300,000 in community colleges (MHRD, 2011).

Both RPL and community colleges are expected to overcome the deficit in formal vocational skills and facilitate certification in one of the levels of the NSQF.

Resources and references


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