

BHUTAN

The development of the Bhutan Qualifications Framework (BQF) was mandated in 2010 by the Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan (BAC, 2012). The BQF is intended to build on the work already done by the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF), a qualifications framework for the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector which was developed in 2003. The BVQF was intended to reform the TVET system by developing qualifications with input from employers and training providers, thus ensuring quality of skills and establishing a benchmark for comparison with international standards (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, 2010). This chapter will therefore discuss both the BQF and the BVQF (sometimes referred to as the 'BVQ sub-framework').

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Bhutan has a total population of 738,267 and an HDI ranking of 141st in the world. The GNI PPP is USD 4.05 billion; the literacy rate in 2005 was 59.5% (Lhazom, n.d., p.9;). The country is still primarily an agrarian society based on subsistence farming. The major economic sectors apart from farming are electricity and construction. These represent a vital source of both hard currency and employment. A large proportion of the workers in these sectors are migrants, particularly at the highest and lowest extremes of the skill spectrum. Middle-level and management level jobs are occupied mainly by Bhutanese.

Greater enrolment in primary and secondary education has increased demand for post-secondary education and training (after Years 12 and 13). However, the shortage of tertiary education institutions in Bhutan has led to an exodus of students to foreign universities, particularly in India (Thinley, 2009).

The TVET and post-secondary sectors are administered by a bewildering variety of different bodies, making it difficult for students to progress either within a field or from one field to another. Whilst most TVET courses are under the administration of the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR), diploma courses in TVET are administered by the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) and academic courses by the Ministry of Education. Other ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture also provide vocational education and training as well as employment opportunities to school leavers. A system is therefore needed that recognises diverse kinds of qualifications and clarifies equivalences between them.

Unemployment among TVET graduates has become a much more acute problem in recent years. Limited job growth in government has made it more difficult for graduates to obtain jobs in the government and corporate sectors; meanwhile, the number of students leaving school without employable skills has increased, even among those completing training in Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs). Despite efforts to promote the growth of the private sector, creating attractive jobs has proved difficult. Supply of and demand for skills thus remain mismatched.

The low status of TVET means that it is the least preferred route among young people. Private training providers (particularly in ICTs and services) often seek to fill the gap left by inadequate TVET provision. They then look to the government for guidance and regulations to make their qualifications more marketable, for example through affiliation or official endorsements of certificates.

A further challenge is the supply-driven orientation of non-formal skills training initiatives for rural people rather than a demand-driven orientation highlighting, for example, how a person's competences can be utilised in the labour market and in society.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The BQF aims to provide an up-to-date and flexible framework that:

- guarantees the quality of education and training;
- accommodates the diverse educational and career goals of Bhutanese people, including those who aspire to work outside Bhutan;
- enables comparison and ensures consistency between qualifications offered by academic, vocational and monastic institutions;
- allows Bhutanese qualifications to be recognised and valued internationally, promoting workers' international mobility;
- facilitates lifelong learning;
- allows for lateral movement between different fields;
- enables human resources to be more effectively deployed;
- provides for the recognition and accreditation of prior learning; and
- promotes higher Gross National Happiness (GNH).

THE BVQ SUB-FRAMEWORK

The BVQ sub-framework (Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, 2010) aims to:

- increase learners' and workers' mobility within both the job market and higher education;
- increase learners' and workers' international mobility by making qualifications internationally comparable and transferable;
- improve young people's perception of the status of TVET;
- improve the quality of training by introducing curricula formulated with input from industry stakeholders;
- recognise non-formal and informal learning;
- make qualifications more transparent; and
- facilitate "learner-centred" teaching (Lhazom, n.d., p.3).

Educational policy in Bhutan is strongly influenced by the theory of Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Thinley, 1999). In GNH-inspired learning, the learner is seen as a whole individual. Instead of focusing on a narrow set of job-specific skills, GNH-inspired learning seeks to inculcate a common set of core skills (Thinley, 2009), which include:

- knowledge of a subject area;
- practical skills including information management;
- social skills and responsibilities;
- GNH values and principles including mindful leadership;
- communication and ICT skills;
- accountability and autonomy;
- problem solving and scientific skills; and
- innovation and entrepreneurial skills.

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

The BQF was developed by the Ministry of Education. The Bhutan Accreditation Council (BAC) is responsible for establishing the relationship between tertiary academic education, TVET, and the school system. The BAC recently produced a document on the BQF for the use of local and international stakeholders containing information on each qualification (BAC, 2012). This document provides basic guidelines for providers to develop clearly defined and suitably named qualifications programmes.

The BVQF was initiated between October 2000 and June 2003 as one of the programmes of the National Technical Training Authority (NTTA) under the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR) and in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), now called the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

In 2003, the Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Authority (BVQA) was established as a regulatory department under the MoLHR in coordination with the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) and the NTTA. This was intended to dissolve the division between the training delivery and regulatory functions of the NTTA. In January 2006, however, the BVQA was replaced by the Department of Occupational Standards (DOS) in accordance with government directives. The DOS, which is one of four departments under the MoLHR, currently has the mandate to:

- improve and monitor the quality of vocational skills;
- develop policies and procedures of quality assurance;
- develop qualifications;
- develop the National Assessment and Certification System; and
- develop and implement the National Accreditation System.

These objectives are pursued through a departmental structure comprised of three divisions: the Standards and Qualifications Division; the Assessment and Certification Division; and the Review and Audit Division.

The DOS is responsible for the development of Occupational Profiles (OP). There is an OP for each discipline or disciplines covered by a qualification. For example, a student may obtain a Bachelor's degree majoring in English and Environmental Sciences (BAC, 2012). Occupational Profiles incorporate information from industry experts about the skills they require from their workers in the light of current economic and technological conditions. A Technical Advisory Committee advises the DOS on the identification of priority occupations, taking into account international and regional comparability of qualifications.

Occupational Profiles provide employers, employees and job-seekers with a common understanding of the knowledge, skills and competences required for a particular job. Occupational Profiles also help curriculum developers create curricula for qualifications programmes. They support educational services such as occupational training, exchange and promotion, as well as supporting a reliable testing and certification system that complies with international standards. The goal is to increase the proportion of the labour force holding National Competency Certificates.

Occupational Profiles are developed at three occupational levels: NC1, NC2 and NC3 (see section below on Levels and Descriptors). They take into account the following criteria:

- complexity of skills
- knowledge and competences
- duties and tasks
- working environment

- complexity of task sequences and junctures
- degree of routine
- teamwork
- leadership
- degree of autonomy
- degree of control of financial and physical resources
- degree of analysis and diagnosis involved.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The BQF has eight qualification levels, each of which assesses the following criteria:

- depth, complexity and comprehension of knowledge;
- application of knowledge and skills;
- degree of autonomy and creativity in decision making;
- communication skills; and
- breadth and sophistication of practices (BAC, 2012).

The BQF caters for all types of qualifications, whether certificates, diplomas or degrees. Qualifications are awarded by a competent authority which affirms successful completion of the course of study in question and achievement of the expected standard. This guarantees the holder's ability to perform the job for which he/she is qualified.

The BQF includes three qualification levels relating to vocational education. National Certificate NC1 (semi-skilled work) is equivalent to qualification level 3. National Certificates NC2 (skilled work) and NC3 (highly skilled work) correspond to qualification level 4. National Diplomas 1 and 2 (for supervisory personnel) make up qualification level 5.

Table 1. The Bhutan Qualifications Framework

BQF Level	School Education	Vocational Education	University Education	Monastic Education
8			Doctorate	Khenpo
7			Master's Degree	Geshey
6			Bachelor's Degree	Tenchoe
5		ND1 and ND2	Diploma	Madhyamik
4	BHSEC	NC2 and NC3		
3	BCSE	NC1		
2	LSE			
1	PE			

PE= Primary Education; LSE= Lower Secondary Education; BCSE = Bhutan Certificate for Secondary Education; BHSEC= Bhutan Higher Secondary Education Certificate; NC= National Certificate; ND= National Diploma

Source: BAC, 2012.

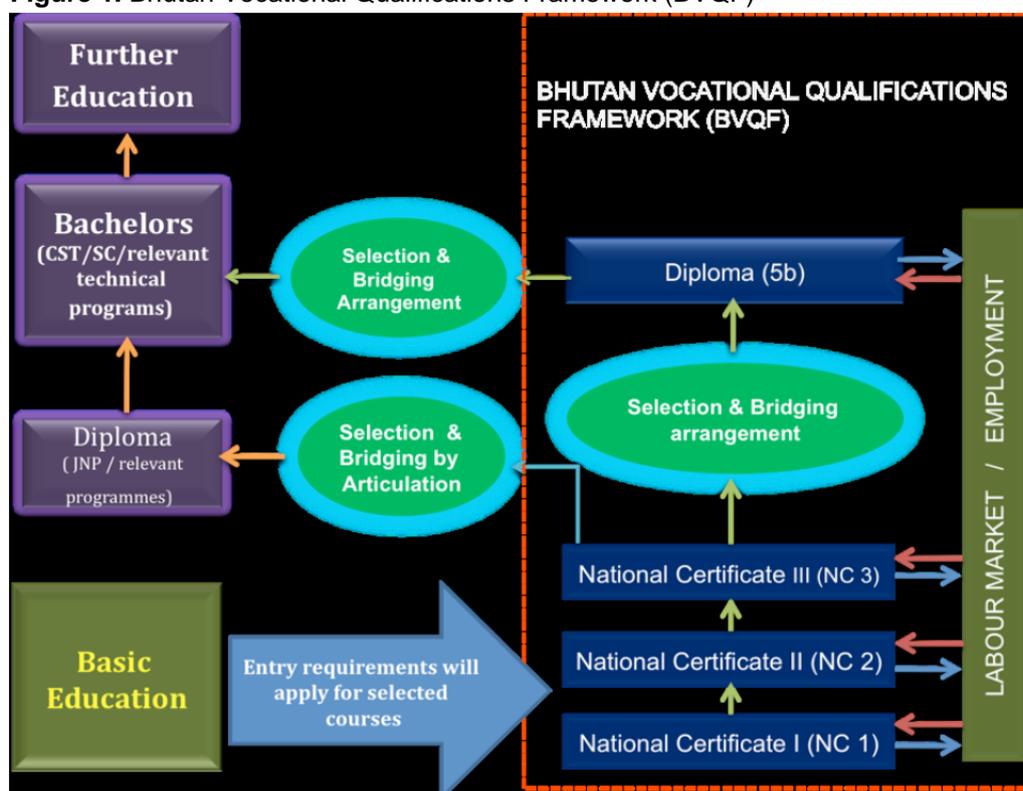
Credit is awarded where candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a field and show that they are able to apply this knowledge to practical situations. The amount of time and effort the candidate invests in carrying out required activities is also taken into consideration. Credit is awarded not on the basis of experience per se, but rather on the basis of what has been learned through reflecting on experience (BAC, 2012).

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

The BQF was designed to support the building of pathways between different sub-sectors of education and training. Pathways between vocational and academic qualifications will allow for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning; credit transfer and work experience programmes will promote career planning and continuous learning. The BQF provides equivalences between qualifications of different types and at different levels. It also introduces regulations on the accumulation and transfer of credits and the accreditation of prior learning, as well as on entry requirements and the use of certificates and diplomas. Diploma programmes may be designed in conjunction with degree programmes so as to enable graduates of a diploma programme to enter the second year of a degree programme.

The BVQF already determines entry to formal TVET courses after basic education (that is, after seven years' primary and four years' secondary education) (MoLHR, 2010, p.7). The TVET courses are assessed against the National Certificate (NC) levels. These are supported by level descriptors elaborating the range of responsibilities and learning demands at each level (see Levels and Descriptors above). The BVQF structure also makes provision for progression from National Certificate to diploma and degree levels. This has been made possible by the Royal University of Bhutan and the Ministry of Education, along with other organisations under different jurisdictions.

Figure 1. Bhutan Vocational Qualifications Framework (BVQF)



Source: MoLHR, 2006; Lhazom, n.d., p.34

The above illustration (Figure 1) depicts the various bridging arrangements which will enable movement both within and between education and the job market. The government expects that these pathways will enable lifelong learning and upgrade the qualifications of those who might otherwise be in danger of social and educational marginalisation.

There is potentially great scope for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in Bhutan. Bhutan distinguishes between Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL), and Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). APL concerns learning gained through formally assessed and certified programmes outside the university. APCL covers

learning achieved and assessed through a formal programme of study in a higher education or professional institution. APEL refers to learning gained in informal and non-formal settings such as the workplace or the community.

6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Formal education in Bhutan is already recognised by Indian bodies. The BCSE (class 10) and BHSEC (class 12) administered by the Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment are recognised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in Delhi, the Council of the Boards of School Education in India (COBSE), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examination (CISCE). It is hoped that the BQF will help extend this recognition to other countries, as well as attracting international scholars and students to Bhutan. The BQF will provide tools for the establishment of mutually beneficial alliances with top-quality universities and institutions around the world (BAC, 2012). In order to achieve these goals, the BQF will be closely related to other regional and international qualifications frameworks (BAC, 2012).

7. IMPORTANT LESSONS AND FUTURE PLANS

The adoption of the BQF (levels and descriptors) in 2012 represents a major step in the development of a reference framework. Important issues of governance have also been solved. Whilst the Bhutan Accreditation Council is responsible for the school, tertiary education and continuing education sectors, the Department of Occupational Standards in the Ministry of Labour assumes responsibility for setting standards in vocational qualifications and developing occupational profiles.

Bhutan is making great efforts to overcome hurdles in the implementation of the BQF by improving institutional capacity of public authorities (administrative) and other stakeholders, as well as nurturing stakeholders' awareness of the importance of shifting from a curriculum-based to a competency-based approach to education (Lhazom, n.d.). Whilst still striving towards a modern knowledge-based economy, Bhutan has made its policy on BQF appropriate to the local context, focusing on training TVET teachers, improving curricula and teaching resources, building partnerships with industries and employers, and smoothing out differences among the different organisations responsible for TVET and higher education.

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