Recognising your Competencies

Issue 23

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Editorial

Welcome to this second and last edition of our Newsletter for the year 2017. It has been a very busy and vibrant half of the year but nonetheless rewarding as the Authority continued to reap results in its quest to live up to its mandate. Overall, the achievements of this second half of the year have ensured that the SQA achieves the majority of its targets set for the year and even surpass several.

The Authority welcomed a new member of staff on its team in November. Ms Dazielle Laporte occupies the position of Principal Quality Assurance Officer for Recognition of Prior Learning and Standards Setting.

The SQA has continually engaged with tertiary education institutions through workshops to build capacity, meetings, dialogues and information sharing amongst other communication channels. The continued engagement has strengthened working partnerships and ensured continued progress in quality assurance. This is evidenced for example in the remarkable improvement in applications submitted for programme validation by institutions as the number of re-submissions required to achieve standards for full validation status have considerably reduced. This in turn gives clear indication that institutions are increasingly mindful of the quality criteria for programmes established by the SQA and are cognisant of the need to ensure that they produce quality graduates.

The SQA is among the eight SADC Member States selected for piloting the alignment of their National Qualifications Framework (NQFs) to the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). The SADCQF is a reference framework consisting of ten (10) Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) Levels based on learning outcomes which will provide a regional benchmark for qualifications and quality assurance (QA) mechanisms in SADC. The purpose of the SADCQF is to enable easier movement of learners and workers across the SADC region and internationally. Alignment will be enabled by mutual trust and recognition of achievement at a regional level. Regional alignment will also enable individuals to make comparisons of their learning and competence levels and would reduce unnecessary duplication of learning and effort when moving through SADC for study or work purposes.

We are proud to note that progress on this front is on schedule and soon a National Alignment Committee (NAC) will be appointed by the Minister for Education and Human Resource Development to oversee the alignment of the Seychelles NQF with the SADCQF. The SQA is responsible to drive the process.

It was with pride that the Authority issued the Seychelles Business Studies Academy (SBSA) with its Certificate of Institutional Accreditation. The Academy is the first Professional Centre to be accorded the status of full Accreditation. Congratulations are in order.

The SQA staff benefitted from several capacity building initiatives both locally and abroad whilst the Authority continued to strengthen and widen collaborations on the national, regional and international fronts.

On a final note, we proudly showcase our achievements to our stakeholders and esteemed readers in this final edition of our Newsletter for 2017!

Fiona Ernesta
Chief Executive Officer
Seychelles Qualifications Authority

Validation Process of Programmes of Tertiary Education Institutions

Programme Validation approves for a specified period of time, a specific education and training programme or credit bearing course, offered by an educational and training provider, which leads to the award of a specific qualification or part of a qualification to be registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

By ***validating*** a programme or credit bearing course, the SQA has ensured that the programme or course has met certain national quality assurance criteria to meet the requirements of the NQF at a specific level. This means that there can be public confidence that the programme or course is at the level at which the provider has pitched it.
A ***provisionally validated*** programme / credit bearing course meets the majority of the requirements of the NQF to be offered to learners but minor changes are required to achieve full validation status.

A qualification / course registered on the NQF means that there can be confidence that the qualification / course is at the level at which the provider or institution has pitched it

During the second half of 2017 SQA received eight (8) applications for programme validation of which six were new submissions and two were resubmissions from 2016. Three (3) programmes reached the standard for the award of full validation status while three (3) programmes received Provisional Validation status. The remaining two (2) applications submitted are undergoing the process of validation. The programmes / short courses which received full validation status are as follows:

1. Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management offered by the Seychelles Tourism Academy (STA)

2. Diploma in Emergency Medical Care offered by the National Institute of Health and Social Services (NIHSS)

3. Basic Training in QuickBooks Accounting Software (credit bearing short course) offered by Seychelles Business Studies Academy (SBSA)

Summary of Validated Programmes
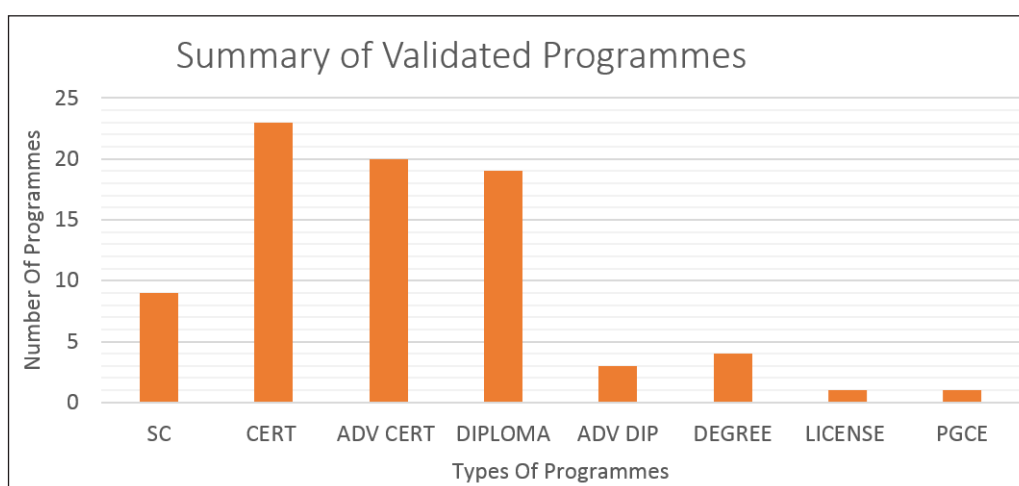
Note:
The Advanced Diploma in Hospitality Management offered by STA had previously been validated. Since its five-year validation status had elapsed it had to be submitted for a new validation round.

In total, eighty (80) locally developed programmes (inclusive of nine (9) credit bearing short courses/ part qualifications) have reached the standard for the Authority to award full validation status. A breakdown of the different types of programmes (including short courses) with full validation status is given above.

Institutional Accreditation

Institutional accreditation certifies, for a specified period of time, that an institution fulfils the quality requirements of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority and has the capacity to provide education and training programmes leading to the award of qualifications to be registered on the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework; and to assess the performance of learners participating in such programmes.

Seychelles Business Studies Academy Acquires Certificate Of Institutional Accreditation!

On 8 September 2017 the Seychelles Business Studies Academy (SBSA) finally made the leap to become the first Professional Centre to be accredited in Seychelles. This demonstrates how exceptional individuals worked as a team to deliver exceptional results, thus certainly a deserving award for everyone.

The official handover of the Accreditation certificate was done during a short ceremony on Tuesday 31 October 2017 at 10a.m at the UniSey Theatre at Anse Royale. Ms Fiona Ernesta, CEO of the Seychelles Qualifications Authority, presented the certificate during the ceremony marking this prestigious milestone for SBSA.

The journey to achieving full accreditation has been a long but fruitful one which has enabled SBSA to improve in numerous ways. The whole exercise was a rigorous one which demanded a lot from the members of staff; starting with a self-evaluation report which we worked through as per dedicated groups before bringing everything together into one report to send to SQA; followed by the monitoring visit by the SQA accreditation team during which time SBSA staff participated fully in the interviews, discussions and presentations; and finally the team's report would reach us indicating our status.

In 2012, 2015 and again 2016 SBSA was judged as being fit for Provisional Accreditation. The reports always contained recommendations which we viewed as a means of helping us improve and thus we threw ourselves wholeheartedly into working on them and ensuring that our quarterly reports to SQA showed achievement of the different aspects as much as we could.

In 2017, SBSA undertook the whole process again and, after the SQA Accreditation Team's visit, was this time given Full Accreditation. The status of full accreditation certifies for a specified period of time (in our case 5 years), that SBSA has the capacity to provide education and training programmes leading to the award of qualifications registered on the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework; and to assess the performance of learners participating in such programmes.

All the programmes and courses we offer are officially validated by SQA and so this status of full accreditation complements our validation certificates and thus companies which employ our graduates can definitely be assured that they have had quality education. We believe that with this tremendous step forward we are definitely on our way to achieving our vision of becoming a successful and regionally recognised Professional Centre.

During the same ceremony, SBSA also launched its new website (www.sbsa.edu.sc) and Electronic Management Information System, IFNOSS, both of which were also strongly recommended by SQA in previous accreditation reports, and which SBSA has implemented in its bid to ensure continuous improvement for the Academy.

Tuesday 31 October 2017 definitely marked a long awaited triumph for SBSA and the start of a brand new chapter in its quest to become a successful, regionally recognised Professional Centre.

Contributed by: Mrs Josianne Bristol, Director SBSA

Ms Fiona Ernesta, the CEO of SQA presents the Director of SBSA with the Certificate of Institutional Accreditation

Group photo of SBSA staff

Accreditation Visit to the Seychelles Institute of Art and Design (SIAD)

The SQA Accreditation Team conducted an accreditation visit to the Seychelles Institute of Art and Design (SIAD) in August. The Accreditation Team noted many strong points of the Institute, and also identified some areas of weakness that needed to be addressed, some of which were raised by the Institute's Self-Evaluation Team in their Report. Subsequently, the SQA by virtue of the authority vested in it through the Seychelles Qualifications Authority Act of 2005 accorded to SIAD the status of provisional accreditation for a further period of one (1) year.

We provide an account of the Accreditation Visit from the perspective of the Director of SIAD.

Accreditation Visit of SIAD

The Seychelles Institute of Art and Design (SIAD) submitted an application requesting for Accreditation of the Institution in June 2017 to the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA). As an institution, SIAD must ensure that it is capable of delivering the specific programmes and to assess learners for the award of the specific qualifications as we move into the new landscape of self-governance and autonomy in 2018. Institutional accreditation of education and training institutions is known to be both an opportunity to demonstrate compliance with the national quality assurance criteria for accountability purposes and an opportunity for quality improvement.

Prior to the accreditation visit, the process entailed submission of a self-evaluation report. The document was submitted in July this year to SQA and focussed on the six performance areas known as: Leadership and Management; Management of Resources and Environment; Programme Development; Teaching and Learning; Engagement with Community and Regulatory Bodies; and Management of Quality, and was compiled and presented by management staff to the Accreditation Team.

The accreditation exercise brought together different stakeholders, learners, and staff of SIAD together with one main objective, and that was to assess whether we are complying and responding to quality criteria of the six performance areas mentioned above. The Accreditation Team spent one whole week at SIAD from Monday 7th to Friday 11th August 2017 to review and evaluate documents including current practices and activities before sharing the content of a preliminary report on the last day of the visit. Despite a few challenges, it was very encouraging to know that SIAD has made remarkable improvements in recent years in all six performance areas.

SIAD has submitted its action plan to SQA as per the outcome and recommendations made by the team during the accreditation visit. The plan should enable SIAD to address key challenges and issues brought to light within a time frame of 12 months, after which the Institute can apply for full accreditation status.

While gaining accreditation status signifies an important milestone in the life of an institution, our primary concern is on the need to put in place a change management strategy in order to transform the culture to one of continuous improvement crucial for maintaining and enhancing quality. SIAD needs to identify an appropriate framework and processes that will create the foundation for cultivating and sustaining a quality culture with an emphasis on monitoring and evaluation.

SIAD takes this opportunity to thank the Seychelles Qualifications Authority, staff, students, stakeholders and the Accreditation Team for their contribution, involvement and participation in this exercise. After all, SIAD has a responsibility! One that is committed to the quality of its activities and standards of qualifications it provides.

Contributed by: *Mrs Christine Payet, Director SIAD*

Group photo with CEO-SQA, Accreditation Team, Director, and staff and students of SIAD

Audit of the Seychelles Police Academy

An audit of Seychelles Police Academy (SPA) was carried out by Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) at the request of the Designated Minister responsible for Internal Affairs in the Office of the President of the Republic of Seychelles. It was conducted by a team of three local consultants appointed by SQA. The team spent three days (11th-13th September 2017) at the Academy to gather data for the exercise. The purpose of the audit was to throw some light on possible causes for the unsatisfactory performance of several of the graduates of the Academy upon graduation and deployment to active duty and to make proposals for improvement.

In its Audit Report, the Audit Team commended the Academy for its many strengths. The Audit Report also noted areas for improvement that will need to be addressed to ensure that the Academy lives up to its mandate.

Workshop on Internal quality Assurance

In its effort to continue to build the capacity Professional Centres in Internal Quality Assurance, the SQA organized a one day workshop on 13 September 2017. Workshop participants were representatives of the Management Team of five Professional Centres. The workshop was facilitated by CEO SQA and the Director of the Seychelles Institute of Art and Design (SIAD) and had the following as objectives:

- Familiarise participants with the basics in Quality Assurance
- Explore Cycles of Quality Management and core processes required for quality managed institutions,
- Discuss Terms of Reference for Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Committee,
- Audit IQA mechanisms and processes in place in institutions and identify IQA mechanisms and processes that would need to be set up/developed,
- Share experiences of implementation of IQA mechanisms and processes and discuss challenges to implementation.

Workshop content was derived from the 'Internal Quality Assurance Handbook for Tertiary Institutions, 2013' developed by the SQA for use by institutions, as well as best practices in IQA worldwide.

The major part of the workshop was dedicated to auditing of IQA mechanisms and processes in place in institutions and identifying IQA mechanisms and processes that would need to be set up/developed. We used the IQA Checklist of the SQA's 'Internal Quality Assurance Handbook for Tertiary Institutions' for this exercise, and participants were grouped by in-

stitution. This proved to be a very fruitful exercise that engaged groups fully and got them to seriously address the issue of quality assurance in their institutions.

Following a presentation by each group on what has been achieved and what else needs to be set up/developed, there was agreement that a major deficiency was an IQA Policy for institutions. Subsequently, the workshop concurred to have a second workshop for finalising an IQA Policy for Professional Centres.

The workshop also provided a platform for participants to articulate, discuss the challenges they are experiencing in the setting up of and in implementing IQA in their institutions, and identify strategies to address the challenges that are within their control.

The workshop will be conducted for Professional Centres that did not have the opportunity to attend during the first part of next year,

Meeting of the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) 19-20 September 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa

The meeting was attended by Chief Executive Officers and Directors of national institutions responsible for Certification and Accreditation of education and skills training, from the following Member States: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the SADC Secretariat. The meeting was also attended by representatives from United Nations Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The Seychelles was represented by Ms Micole Bistoquet on behalf of Ms Fiona Ernesta, a member of the TCCA and CEO of the Seychelles Qualification Authority (SQA) who had to attend a workshop in Johannesburg the following week.

The purpose of the two day meeting was to:

1. Review the progress on the implementation of Committee decisions made in April 2017;
2. Provide update of resolutions of Joint Ministers of Education and Training, Science, Technology and Innovations on the SADCQF and facilitate follow up;
3. Review the implementation of 2-year Action Plan for Accelerating the implementation of the SADC RQF with respect to alignment the quality assurance and verification and development of the SADC Web page on Credible Institution in the SADC Region.
4. Discuss and establish linkages of work of the Committee with other key stakeholders and sectors working on Labour Migration, Quality Assurance and Credit Accumulation and Transfer System in the Region and Recognition of Prior Learning.

Review overall progress towards implementation of the SADCQF since April 2017

The meeting agreed that all the decisions made by the TCCA in April 2017 had been implemented with the exception of the contractual arrangements with Zambia and the development of the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) which were still in progress.

Progress of the two year implementation plan of the TCCA

The progress made in aligning NQFs to the SADCQF was presented as follows:

- The SADCQF was finally launched by the SADC Ministers on 17th June 2017 in Swaziland.
- A peer learning workshop on alignment was hosted by SAQA on 17th-18th June 2017 where the eight pilot countries submitted self-assessment alignment reports to the TCCA Chairperson.
- The provision of information on how to recognise credible Institutions in their countries by nine Member Countries which led to the development of a mock-up web page by SAQA and the commitment by SADC Secretariat to visit SAQA to develop capacity to host the online SADCQF webpage. This would enable members to access information and also for credible Institutions to amend and provide current information.
- Compilation of mobility statistics in the region. This will be generated from information on qualifications verified. Member countries would be required to submit the information by responding to the annual questionnaire.

To ensure that the progress continues, everything fits coherently together and all member states are working at the same pace, a road map was developed for accelerating the implementation of the four aspects of the SADCQF namely:
a) Development and alignment of the NQFs to the SADCQF
b) Quality Assurance
c) Verifications
d) Advocacy and Communication

Development and alignment of the NQFs to the SADCQF

The progress on the different activities to be undertaken until the final report is submitted in November and December 2018 were illustrated. These also included the capacity building workshop, the setting up of the National Alignment Committee (NAC), planning, stakeholder consultations, validation and commissioning of the final alignment report. The meeting noted the progress made on aligning the NQFs to the SADCQF and the completion and submission of the self-assessment report by pilot countries (Seychelles is one of the pilot countries).
SQA's

Since early Human Resource

Quality Assurance

The roadmap for Quality Assurance team was to ensure harmonization of the regional QA system and to ensure that all Member States were at the same level and that the activities are done thoroughly. The group identified the indicators to be used to ensure that the tasks are thoroughly completed

All Member States will undertake a detailed QA self-assessment and the results of the assessment will be used to determine the capacity building initiatives for QA. The initiatives will be harmonised into the broad capacity building programme for implementation of the SADC-QF.

Verifications

The group responsible pointed out the progress made so far on the verification focus areas where a concept document for a recognition manual was developed by Swaziland and shared to Member States in May 2017. The three projects to be undertaken are real time verification, recognition manual and mobility statistics. Real time verification is to be carried out it two (2) phases: Pilot and roll out. The pilot stage of the project will develop infrastructure hardware server and software and as a result the applicant will be receiving e-certificate of verification that can be delivered electronically to them in their country or place where the certificate is required.

Advocacy and Communication

The short term and long term plans developed for accelerating communication amongst the Member States were presented. It was specified that the SADC communication plans should be aligned with the project plans and should include clear objectives, the stakeholders identified and what should be done. All member states should have twitter and Face book pages.

Review of the SADC Ministers decision

The meeting was informed that Ministers were impressed with the achievements made by the TCCA. The meeting resolved to uphold the recommendations of the Ministers as follows:

a) to extend the interim arrangements of providing administrative support to the SADC Secretariat from six months to one year by the Member States that had volunteered.

b) the outgoing Troika Member of the TCCA to continue to participate as an observer for 1 year to promote continuity.

Group photo of participants of the TCCA Meeting

Technical Workshop on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): From Key Concepts to Implementation

Upon invitation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the CEO of the SQA attended a Technical Workshop on 'Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): From Key Concepts to Implementation' that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 25 to 29 September 2017. Workshop participants were from all continents.

The technical workshop aimed to ensure that participants:
- are familiar with the contribution of RPL to enhancing the employability of women and men, particularly those disadvantaged in the labour market;
- have a good understanding of the benefits of RPL for the tripartite constituents;
- have a clear understanding of how to improve the links between non- and informal training, the world of work, and formal education and training systems;
- are able to plan, implement and monitor RPL systems and programmes.

The methodology adopted for the workshop was 'peer-to-peer learning', which included introductory presentations followed by country presentations on lessons learned, group work and interactive activities.

Some key points from the workshop sessions

1) Why RPL?
More and more countries are establishing RPL systems, for which the key drivers include:

- Promoting social inclusion and equity for disadvantaged groups e.g. early school leavers, by valuing experiential learning and providing them with opportunities to obtain qualifications.
- Encouraging lifelong learning in order to create a competent and adaptable workforce that can meet the challenges of a fast-changing labour market, address skills shortages and gaps, and allow holistic development.
- Providing access to higher education.
- Meeting regulatory requirement of sectors in terms of employing qualified persons.
- Improving efficiency and flexibility in education systems by allowing alternative learning pathways (workplace, non-formal, and informal learning) and fast tracking the acquisition of qualifications.
- Fostering employability, and thus better, decent jobs;

Assessment procedures and methods
Assessments must be flexible to adjust to the requirement of the RPL candidates.
Assessment RPL modes are different to traditional assessment and it must be able to mediate. Therefore, assessors must be trained as RPL is a specialized pedagogy.
Certificates, be it full or part must spell out the competencies that the candidate has achieved.
Different candidates can be assessed in different ways for the same thing just as we learn in different ways, that is, same assessment standards but different assessment procedures.

Financing
- Obtaining qualifications through RPL is economical compared to the costs of formal education and training. But it is much more expensive when it comes to the cost of assessment and certification in formal training as RPL requires intensive, personalized counselling and assessment.
- The cost of RPL depends on the methodology a country adopts, the level and type of qualification and the extent of the support needed by RPL candidates.
- Countries must have clear guidelines on cost-sharing of RPL between government, employers and candidates to ensure its sustainability and the up scaling, since candidates already have to bear opportunity costs as many of them might be employed and thus may put off RPL if they have to bear most of the cost. Initially, costs need to be subsidized by government, as is the case for education and formal training systems. Employers could bear the opportunity cost, for example by giving paid leave, and also cost of top up/gaps training.

The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you. By: BB King

It is not advisable to make RPL fully free even if the fee is only symbolic .

Some key issues about RPL

 - Candidates are a lot more successful if they are guided through the RPL process: the stress is on guidance and support to the candidate.

 - RPL is not about instruction but about assessing what candidates say they have. It is the outcomes of learning that are assessed, not the learning. It is about the visibility of competencies. Therefore, assessment is the heart of the system for trust, parity of esteem, and because the input process is unknown.

 - A full qualification cannot be delivered to an illiterate candidate because at the lowest level of the Qualifications Framework the person is literate.

 - RPL is relevant in all education and training sectors.

 - Ensure that there are standards, facilitators and assessors for a qualification before marketing RPL in the qualification.

 - Involve key stakeholders up front in the process to create sense of ownership and be innovative: societal recognition a must; modular provision of top up/gaps training a must; communication a must. Move towards the right direction includes the need for:

 - Removing barriers through explaining and sensitizing;

 - Capacity building for RPL professionals/practitioners including orientation courses (coordinators, facilitators, assessors, etc) and certification;

 - Quality assurance and monitoring;

 - RPL systems and process management (including institutional arrangement and support);

 - Development of Guides and standardised tools including Guide for RPL candidates;

 - Development of RPL information management systems.

The technical workshop provided confirmation that the Seychelles is on the right track with RPL. Most topics that were addressed are covered in our National Policy on RPL and Guidelines for Implementation of RPL. The SQA will need to take into account the best practices highlighted in the workshop to ensure successful scaling up of RPL implementation in Seychelles .

Group photo of RPL workshop organizers, facilitators and participants

Regional Workshop on Identifying Capacity Building Needs for the Improvement of Internal (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA) in Higher Education in Southern Africa (SADC): 9-10 October 2017, Pretoria, South Africa

The workshop was organized by The Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES), a joint programme of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rector's Conference (HRK), in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) South Africa, the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) and the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA).

The meeting was attended by Chief Executive Officers of quality assurance agencies and heads of higher education institutions of Southern Africa. The organising consortium identified the Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) as a key stakeholder, and the CEO was invited to lead a delegation to the regional workshop. The other participants to form the Seychelles delegation were Mrs Hilda Julie, Principal Standards Setting Officer of the SQA and Mrs Luciana Lagrenade, Registrar and Quality Assurance Director of the University of Seychelles (UniSey).

 The objectives of the Regional Workshop were as follows:
 - Raise awareness and facilitate a better understanding of the benefits of regional cooperation on Quality Assurance (QA);
 - Take stock of divergences and commonalities between national systems within a regional cooperation framework (SADC);
 - Analyse the existing internal QA structures at institutional level and external QA structures at national level against the background of regional standards as laid down in the draft African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education;
 - Develop a common understanding between university leadership, professors, quality assurance staff, assessors and ministries on the interrelation between Internal and External Quality Assurance; and
 - Identify current needs and challenges in terms of capacity development for different target groups and develop strategies to respond to these challenges .

A total of 16 African countries were represented at the workshop and the organizers thus considered this first gathering a great success and hoped that this level of collaboration will continue.

The main discussions that took place during the workshop centred around the issues facing quality assurance at the institutional, national and international levels and are highlighted below:

The importance of quality assurance

On the international level, some trends have given quality assurance pride of place in higher education. These include the rise of international rankings and the increased mobility of students and of cross-border provisions (face-to-face and virtual). As a result, quality assurance has risen as a very important mechanism to frame inter-institutional competition and cooperation in higher education and to facilitate the movement of students and cross-border provision.

On the regional level, the significance of quality assurance is also increasing as Southern Africa is becoming a student destination. This raises the question of quality in some institutions and programmes.

The exponential increase in the number of students in Africa has not produced a mass higher education system. Rather there is a concentration of institutions in capital cities and instead of mass education; Africa has massified its institutions. That development has been driven by several factors including the broadening of participation in higher education, the emergence of new players such as private not for-profit and for-profit institutions, and the emergence of transnational education providers. This is the critical element in the loss of quality.

Five principles for going forward

Based on the workshop discussions and presentations, the following five principles were presented that could frame and structure the discussions about diversity and harmonization of quality assurance practices in the SADC region.

The Seychelles delegation at the workshop on identifying capacity building needs for the improvement of IQA and EQA in Higher education in Southern Africa

Regional Workshop on Identifying Capacity Building Needs for the Improvement of Internal (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA) in Higher Education in Southern Africa (SADC): 9-10 October 2017, Pretoria, South Africa

A joint approach: A joint approach: Different functions at different levels

The first principle is to ensure that the three levels at which quality assurance is relevant (the institutional, the national and the regional) are understood.

The institutional level refers to the internal quality assurance (IQA) processes of a higher education institution. The national level consists of external quality assurance (EQA) approaches that are adapted to each national context and are meant to address specific national higher education needs and deficits.

The regional level provide a framework of shared principles to balance the national diversity and celebrate its richness. The regional level should also structure the coordination of the multiple actors that are working in the quality assurance field in order to optimise synergies and ensure cross-learning.

Different actors, different processes, with good coordination and synergy

Although each players in the field of quality assurance have specific responsibilities, it is useful to think about beneficiaries and stakeholders as partners as well. They should be partners during the development of external quality processes and during the phases where those processes are evaluated. This will promote broad ownership of quality assurance and ensure that its enhancement purpose remains a focus.

There is also a need to ensure that IQA and EQA are properly linked to ensure that EQA is not so invasive as to restrict the growth of IQA. EQA should ensure that the higher education institution has clearly articulated vision and mission statements, and it should help the HEI ensure the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance mechanisms to also assess institutional quality."

Fostering engagement

An effective and successful IQA involves the whole community: academic and administrative staff, students, alumni, external partners.

A partnership approach would also address challenges to EQA, namely: ambiguous regulations, standards that stifle institutional diversity, lack of coordination across multiple QA bodies, operational independence and objectivity of EQA.

Training, attendance at international events and staff mobility will provide the staff with the technical expertise to carry out their responsibilities, emphasise the purposes of quality assurance and its limitations and help QA agency staff remain abreast of higher education trends both nationally and across borders. International cooperation raises quality levels through appropriate benchmarking, whether formal or informal. Students should also be seen as partners of the quality assurance process and they too, will need training and development to be effective partners in IQA and EQA.

Enhancing diversity, creativity, innovation and change

Although it is important to use standards, criteria, checklists and quantitative methods to regulate a higher education system, there is a risk represented by quality assurance to limit institutional diversity, innovation and change.

The challenge, for both EQA and IQA, is to address the needs for regulations and accountability and improvement and change and to balance those needs in a way that enhance the system rather than curtail its development.

Check and change; check again and change again

A mature quality assurance body reflects on its own practices in the context of a changing environment. This includes reviewing the impact of its processes by assessing its benefits relative to the costs, and looking at all the activities that have been developed over time to analyse the impacts and to integrate the different functions.

This type of internal review is essential as QA systems mature and become more complex and bureaucratic. The tendency to multiply and add complexity to QA procedures is always present and it is incumbent on QA agencies and higher education institutions to review their processes at regular intervals in order to explore how to simplify their approaches and to ensure that neither parties are overburdened or pulled in different directions.

Benefits for the SQA

The issues raised in the workshop and outcomes of discussions will be greatly helpful to the SQA as it implements quality assurance standards and criteria and as it continues to assist tertiary education institutions in the Seychelles to strengthen their internal quality assurance processes and procedures. As a quality assurance agency, the Authority is now better informed of the benefits of working in partnership with the institutions at all times and engaging with them to ensure continued progress in quality assurance

Accelerated Programme For Economic Integration (APEI)

The SQA Officer for Evaluation participated in the First Negotiating Round for a Mutual Recognition Agreement for Accountancy Services held from the 9th to 11th October 2017 in Port Louis, Mauritius. This meeting followed the APEI Accountancy Regulators Forum in March 2017 which brought together stakeholders involved in the negotiation and implementation of a Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for accountancy in the APEI region in order to familiarize them with trade in services and experiences across the globe on concluding MRAs for accounting services, share experiences on the regulatory regimes on accounting education and qualification in the APEI member states and chart the way forward on MRA accounting. The 1st Negotiating Round was attended by regulators of the accounting profession, the Regional Multi-disciplinary Centre of Excellence (RMCE) coordinators and officials from Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and Zambia.

Mr. Prakash Hurry from the RMCE welcomed all delegates and expressed his gratitude to the Commonwealth Secretariat for the technical and financial support for the negotiation of MRAs in Accountancy. He noted that the conclusion of a Mutual Recognition Agreement on Accountancy will be a major breakthrough for the facilitation of mobilisation of regulated Professionals. Mr Kenneth Matupa, Director Revenue Policy in the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development and APEI Technical Chair, recalled the five pillars under the APEI: improved regulatory framework; elimination of barriers; trade in services; trade facilitation; capacity building; and peer to peer learning. Mr. Kirk Haywood, Trade Advisor at the Commonwealth Secretariat served as facilitator.

Group photo of participants of the RPL refresher training

The meeting reviewed the regulatory audit matrix using it as an opportunity to explore areas of convergence and divergence among the various regulatory frameworks in the APEI member states. The meeting also reviewed and updated the draft APEI MRA for Accountancy. It was agreed that the MRA would apply to Accountants and Auditors. The Meeting made the following recommendations: the APEI Member States undertake further domestic consultations on outstanding issues; the APEI Technical Working Group takes note of the concerns of the meeting that the definitions of business persons, business visitors, professionals and intra-corporate transferees includes non-citizens and non-permanent residents and that the meeting was of the view that these individuals should be outside the scope of the MRA; the auditing regulator of Malawi is invited to the next meeting. The roadmap for negotiating the APEI MRA for Accountancy services and its report with amendments was adopted on the 11th of October 2017.

Workshop on Legal Instruments, Guidelines and Manuals of the SQA

In December 2017, the SQA conducted a first in a series of workshops planned to familiarise Directors and representatives of the Management Team of Professional Centres with the Authority's legal instruments, policies, policy guidelines and manuals. The workshop was facilitated by the CEO of SQA.

The one day workshop remained vibrant throughout with presentations, discussions, questions, queries and clarifications.

At the end, it was clear that participants had a more informed understanding of the SQA, the content of the SQA Act of 2005 and the Regulations setting up the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of 2008. They expressed their expressed their appreciation to the SQA for this much required initiative. The next workshop has been scheduled for the first quarter of 2018

The CEO of SQA presents the legal instruments to the participants

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process whereby prior learning acquired formally, non-formally and informally is assessed against standards or learning outcomes and is given recognition. It is the acknowledgment through evaluation of a person's competencies acquired during previous training and workshops, work or life experience, which may be used to grant credit in a course or a unit standard leading to a qualification. RPL gives formal credit for learning regardless of where the learning was achieved.

In 2017, the SQA has moved ahead with its activities towards the national implementation of RPL. Upon finalisation of the Policy for RPL and the Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL in the first and second quarter 2017, the SQA has focussed on the development of two additional documents: Guidelines on Fees for RPL; and Schedule of Allowances for RPL Practitioners in the third quarter. The two documents provide details on fees for the RPL process and remuneration for RPL practitioners respectively.

In order to ensure that all locally trained RPL practitioners are au fait with information on the new Policy for RPL and the new Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL, the Authority organised a two-day refresher workshop on the 26th and 27th October 2017. The RPL Coordinators, Assessors and Moderators who attended this refresher workshop were also briefed on new developments in RPL. Mr. Hubert Barbé, SQA's local consultant for RPL served as main facilitator for the refresher workshop.

In the same light, the SQA has started a series of presentations as of November 2017 for stakeholders, decision makers and employees to sensitise them with the new RPL Policy and the Guidelines document and the Guidelines on Fees for RPL. The Authority attaches great importance to stakeholder's comments and suggestions so as to create the sense of ownership required for the success of RPL.

The first presentation was held on Tuesday 21st November 2017 for the personnel of the Ministry for Employment, Immigration and Civil Status. The presentation took place during one of the Productivity Working Group Meeting. The Minister for Employment, Immigration and Civil Status was also present for the presentation. A second presentation targeted officials from the Ministry of Health and was held on Monday 27th November 2017. Officials within the Health departments as well as lecturers from the National Institute of Health and Social Studies (NIHSS) benefited from the presentation.

During the presentations, CEO SQA enlightened the participants on the engagement of the SQA in RPL, highlighting all the logistics in place and the ongoing activities towards the national implementation of RPL. CEO SQA noted that the issue with RPL is that it cannot be adopted from another country. Each country needs to develop its own model and a lot of research is necessary for the development of the tools for RPL including the policy, guidelines, fees and other documents. CEO SQA also highlighted the benefits of RPL for Seychelles.

SQA's local consultant for RPL talked on RPL in the context of Seychelles bringing on board contents of the national Policy and Guidelines document. Much emphasis was placed on the RPL process itself. The fees to be effected by RPL candidates were also discussed.

Participants had the opportunity to air their views on the RPL process. There were fruitful discussions and a number of queries were recorded during the presentations including:

Eligibility of candidates to secure a loan to help meet the cost for undergoing the RPL process.
Whether certificates acquired through the RPL process would be recognised nationally.
Participants also sought for more information on RPL practitioners which the CEO provided and also took the opportunity to invite persons interested to become an RPL practitioner to contact the SQA for further information.

Participants have welcomed the idea of implementing RPL in the Seychelles as a good initiative which will bring benefits to the workforce of our country. The SQA will continue its presentations to stakeholders in 2018. The general public will also be sensitized through the local media, leaflets and the SQA website.

Participants engage in discussion in the RPL refresher training

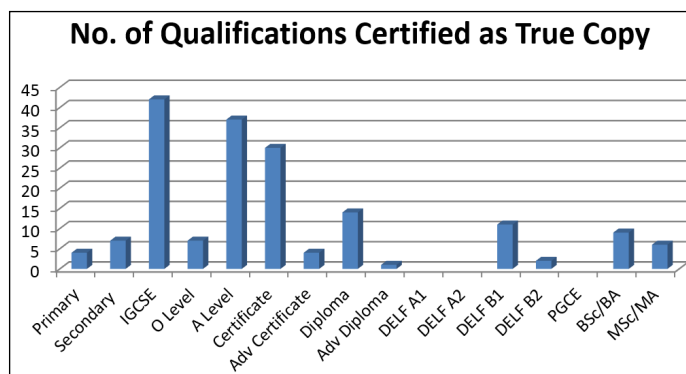# Evaluation and Certification of Qualifications

Certification of Qualifications

Certification of qualifications is a process which establishes the authenticity of qualifications. The SQA welcomes clients on a daily basis for this service. Most of the requests for this service come from secondary school leavers, Advanced Level graduates and other graduates from the local professional centres applying for further studies locally and overseas. A total of 174 qualifications have been certified true copy from July to December 2017. This total represents 72 certificates below the total qualifications certified in the same period in 2016.

Table 1 and graph 1 below shows the qualifications that were certified true copy by type from July to Dec 2017

Qualifications	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Primary			1	1	1	1	4
Secondary	6			1			7
IGCSE	5	8	8	11	8	2	42
O Level		2	2	3			7
A Level	12	7	10	3	5		37
Certificate	7	2	9	6	5	1	30
Adv. Certificate	2	1		1			4
Diploma	2	4	1	4	2	1	14
Adv. Diploma					1		1
DELF A1							
DELF A2							
DELF B1	1	2	1	3	3	1	11
DELF B2		1			1		2
PGCE							
BSc/BA		1	6	1	1		9
MSc/MA	1	1	2	1	1		6
Total	36	29	40	35	28	6	174

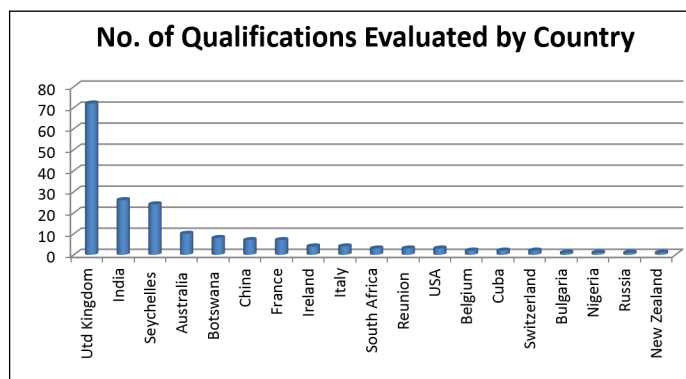Table 1

Graph 1

Evaluation of Qualifications

The process of Evaluation of qualifications establishes the level of qualifications against the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). For this service, it is required that applicants submit their original certificates for verification as well as the academic transcript and proof of identity. As and when necessary, the SQA liaises with the Awarding Bodies, the UK NARIC and other Bodies overseas for additional information for the evaluation process.

A total of 181 qualifications were evaluated from July to December 2017. This figure represents 11 qualifications above the total qualifications evaluated in the same period in 2016. The countries with the highest number of qualifications evaluated in this period are the United Kingdom (72), India (26) and Seychelles (24).

Table 2 and graph 2 below show the distribution of qualifications recognised and evaluated from July to December 2017

Table 2: Distribution of qualifications recognised and evaluated from July to December 2017.-

Countries	No. of Qualifications Evaluated	Countries	No. of Qualifications Evaluated
United Kingdom	72	Reunion	3
India	26	USA	3
Seychelles	24	Belgium	2
Australia	10	Cuba	2
Botswana	8	Switzerland	2
China	7	Bulgaria	1
France	7	Nigeria	1
Ireland	4	Russia	1
Italy	4	New Zealand	1
South Africa	3		
Grand Total 181 qualifications			

Table 2

Graph 1

Progress on Standards Development

The SQA has the overall responsibility for setting of standards for local programmes (Levels 3 to 6 of the NQF). Standards are developed by National Standards Setting Committees (NSSC), following which they are evaluated by a Core Standards Committee (CSC), and are then approved by an Executive Committee (EXCO) if they meet all NQF requirements. Approved standards are registered on the NQF for a period of five years after which they are reviewed for re-registration.

The SQA continued to make progress in the area of unit standards development in 2017 through the one on one training sessions with the Professional Centres. The aim of the sessions is to give more in depth knowledge on standards development to the developers. The focus for the development of unit standards for 2017 has been in the areas of Engineering and Construction, Health, and Tourism. At the time of writing, unit standards for a total of fifty one (51) qualifications are at different stages of development/review or have been approved for registration on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as follows:

- Unit Standards for twenty six (26) qualifications have been approved for registration on the NQF.
- Unit Standards for five (5) qualifications are undergoing final revisions;

- Unit Standards for eight (8) qualifications are being reviewed to satisfy the revised format adopted by SQA as of 2012;
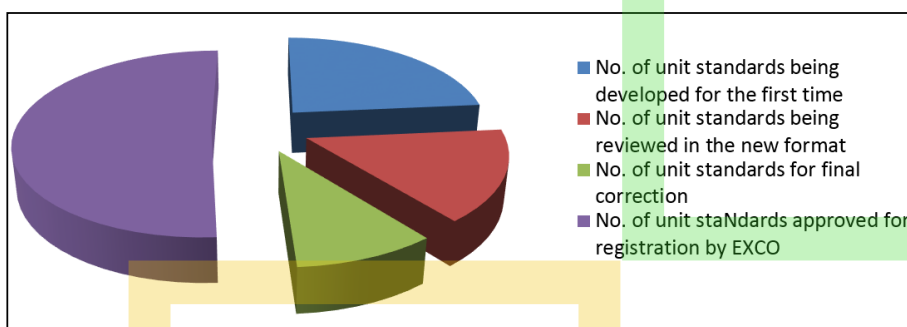- Unit Standards for twelve (12) qualifications are being developed for the first time.

Sensitization is also ongoing with other fields and sectors. At the moment discussion is taking place with the Ministry of Land Use & Habitat to develop unit standards for a qualification in Land Survey. Preliminary research has been done and formal sessions will be conducted with MLUH officers early in 2018 to develop the unit standards.

Within the SQA

Incoming staff
In the second half of 2017, SQA had the pleasure of welcoming Ms Dazielle Laporte into its family. Ms Laporte has taken on the position of Principal Quality Assurance Officer for Recognition of Prior Learning and Standards Setting. She spent the first years of her education at the Anse Boileau and Anse Royale schools after which she joined the school of Advanced Level Studies (SALS). Upon leaving SALS she joined the former National Institute of Education (NIE), now called the Seychelles Institute for Teacher Education (SITE), since she had always

wanted to be a teacher. Her career as a teacher at the Anse Boileau school began in 2008 after she graduated from the National Institute of Education and lasted for ten years. During her teaching career she had the opportunity to enroll on a degree programme with the University of Seychelles, which awarded her with a Bachelor Degree in English in 2015. Prior to her joining the SQA, she was working as an English Teacher at Anse Boileau Secondary School. Ms Laporte at present lives at Anse Aux Poules Bleues and she has an eleven year old daughter named Megan. Ms Laporte says she is very thrilled to be part of the SQA family and looks forward to developing herself further in the field of education and also contributing to the work of the SQA so as to increase its impact in the Seychelles education system. Her transfer to the Authority is timely as the SQA prepares for RPL implementation in 2018.

- No. of unit standards being developed for the first time
- No. of unit standards being reviewed in the new format
- No. of unit standards for final correction
- No. of unit staNdards approved for registration by EXCO

Birthdays

Happy Birthday !!!

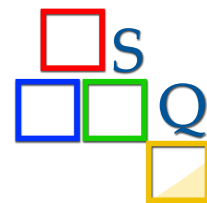The following SQA staff members celebrated their birthday between the months of July to December 2017.

Ms. Fiona Ernesta
Ms. Micole Bistoquet
Ms. Edwina Payet
Ms. Joan Amade

End of year gathering

At the end of a long year of hard work the SQA staff got together to enjoy some well deserved time of refreshing through their end of year lunch. During this time everybody got to unwind, ate some good food, shared some jokes of the funny things that happened during the year, shared some gifts and greetings for the new year ahead. Go ahead guys, you deserve the break!!!