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Theme: Globalization and Diversification of Quality Assurance of Higher Education

Sub-theme: Qualifications Framework

SRI LANKA QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (SLQF) AND SIGNIFICANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework (SLQF) is a nationally consistent framework for all higher education qualifications offered in Sri Lanka. It recognizes the volume of learning of students and identifies the learning outcomes that are to be achieved by the qualification holders. With the objective of having a uniform system in naming a qualification, the designators and qualifiers of each qualification have been identified in the SLQF. The purposes and characteristics of each qualification as well as the minimum admission requirements are also stated in the SLQF.

SLQF integrates the National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) developed by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission and the pathways of lateral mobility between the vocational education sector and higher education sector have also been identified.

SLQF helps in the recognition of accredited prior learning in order to facilitate the vertical mobility within the higher education system. Until the development of SLQF there had been no mechanism to evaluate the qualifications offered by higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. In addition, the SLQF will be helpful to the potential employers to know the level of learning and the attributes of a particular qualification holder.

SLQF is useful to the higher education institutions, both in the public and private sector in designing their courses as the minimum level of learning effort required for each qualification is indicated by way of the minimum number of credits that should be earned by a qualification holder. Thus, the SLQF will contribute towards strengthening the quality of higher education qualifications offered by the universities and other higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) is a new framework aimed at improving quality of higher education and training through recognizing and accrediting qualifications offered by different institutions. It identifies different levels to which the qualifications offered in the entire higher education sector in Sri Lanka are included. It helps to interpret qualifications and judge the relative value of a qualification. This enables the learners to make informed decisions about the qualifications they intend to acquire.

The SLQF identifies the broad levels of competencies that are expected from the holders of different qualifications. The minimum entry requirements for each qualification and the possible route of progression are also identified in the SLQF. This will facilitate the credit transfer and helps in the combination of qualifications as well as progression within the higher education system. It combines school, vocational education and higher education sectors.

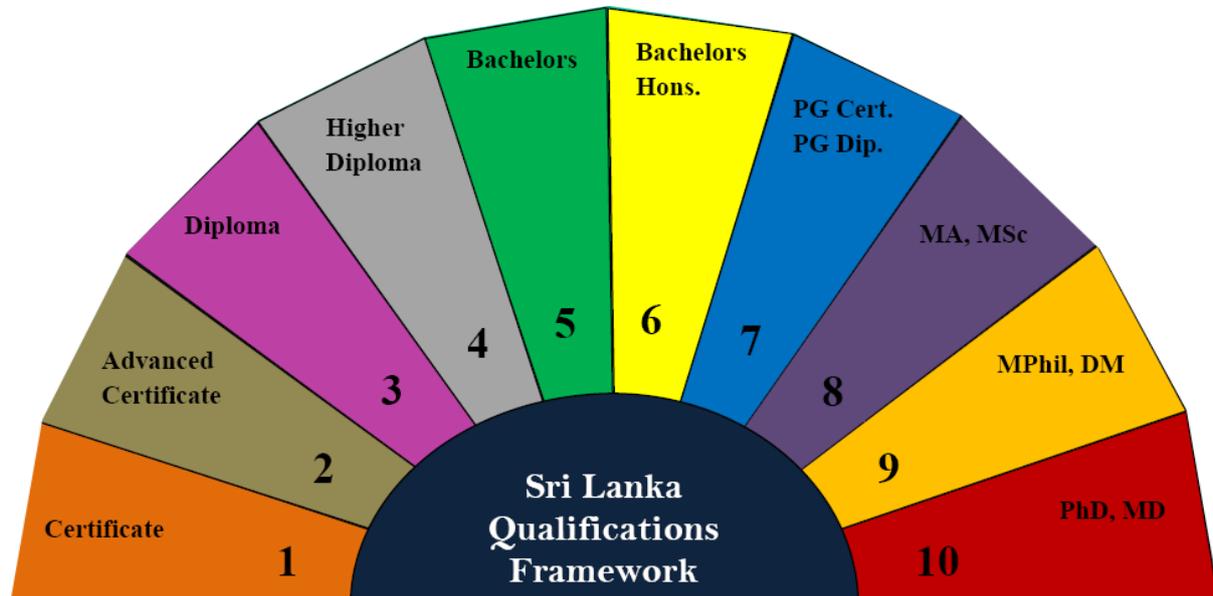


Figure 1 – Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework

SLQF recognizes the outcomes achieved after formal secondary education. It integrates the National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) developed by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) and identifies flexible pathways which assist in lateral mobility between vocational education and higher education sectors by providing basis for recognizing prior learning and credit transfer.

SLQF helps in vertical mobility in higher education and encourages lifelong learning by identifying access to different qualifications. It clearly defines the avenues available for obtaining higher qualifications. It also encourages high quality vocational education and training by recognizing workplace experience which helps in national economic development. It helps in opening up learning and working opportunities irrespective of Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework gender and age. As such, the SLQF facilitates admission to and progression within the higher education system in Sri Lanka.

SLQF also promotes national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Sri Lanka and helps in evaluating the qualifications obtained from overseas institutions. SLQF also contributes significantly towards strengthening quality assurance mechanisms of the entire higher education sector in Sri Lanka.

SLQF applies to all higher education institutions both public and private, which provide postsecondary education. Since the NVQF developed by TVEC is also integrated into SLQF, the post-secondary vocational qualifications can also be included in the framework.

All higher education qualifications offered in Sri Lanka are specified in the SLQF. The SLQF

indicates the designators, qualifiers, minimum credit requirements for a particular qualification as well as the minimum entry requirements.

However, SLQF does not deal with the designing and offering of short term courses by any higher education institution (HEI) that will meet specific learning outcomes. These courses may be of few months duration and a certificate may be awarded on completion of such courses. Those certificates are not in line with the qualifications identified in the SLQF.

Aim and Objectives of SLQF

The aim of SLQF is to create an integral national framework for learning achievements by recognizing and accrediting qualifications offered by different institutions engaged in higher education and vocational training.

The objectives of SLQF are to;

- enhance quality of higher education and training at all levels;
- facilitate access to higher learning and thereby contribute to full personal development of learners and to social and economic development of the country;
- enhance equity in higher education, training and employment opportunities;
- help employers to understand the levels of knowledge, skills and competencies of qualification holders;
- Develop positive attitudes in qualification holders;
- facilitate lateral and vertical mobility, and progression within higher education and career pathways;
- provide guidance in comparing qualifications offered by different institutions;
- help in developing higher education and vocational training programmes
- recognize prior learning and promote lifelong learning.

Main Characteristics

- To improve quality of HE and training through recognizing and accrediting qualifications
- To interpret qualifications and judge the relative value of a qualification.
- To enable the learners to make informed decisions
- To define avenues available for obtaining higher qualifications

Key Benefits

SLQF will be useful to all stakeholders of higher education including students, parents, employers, as well as education and training providers.

For learners, SLQF will be useful to recognize and evaluate prior learning and identify the pathways of acquiring higher qualifications. This will enable learners to develop their full potential and thereby contribute to social and economic development of the country at large. The level descriptors given in the SLQF will be useful for employers in identifying the levels of competencies of qualification holders. It will also help in comparing the qualifications so that the supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competencies could be properly matched. Further, SLQF will be useful in comparing the qualifications offered by different institutions. This will help the employers to find the appropriate qualification holders for their business needs.

SLQF describes the credit requirements for each qualification level as well as intended learning outcomes. Therefore, for higher education providers, both in the state and private sectors, the SLQF will be useful in designing their academic programmes.

SLQF enables all stakeholders of post-secondary education to identify the full range of qualifications offered in the higher education system in Sri Lanka and comparable levels of vocational education and training. This helps to understand how qualifications are related to each other and how they contribute to the enhancement of knowledge and understanding, and improvement of intellectual abilities including analytical skills, evaluation skills, problem solving skills and soft skills.

SLQF will also be useful to the general public to have access to appropriate lifelong education and training, which helps them to fulfill their personal as well as social and economic potential.

SLQF will be useful to programme approving agencies to identify the appropriate levels of qualifications offered by different HEIs. Further, it helps in evaluating different qualifications offered by HEIs, both local and foreign, which will be useful in taking decisions in recruitment and promotion in the academic, technical and professional sectors.

Table 1 - Minimum requirement for each level of the Sri Lanka Qualification Framework

SLQL	NVQL	Qualification Awarded	Minimum Requirements for the Award
SQL 10	-	Doctor of Philosophy/MD with Board/Certification/ Doctor of Letters/ Doctor of Science	Minimum 3 years of full-time or equivalent time of original research after SLQL 6 or above
SQL 9	-	Master of Philosophy/DM	Minimum 2 years of full-time or equivalent time of original research after SLQL 5 or above
SQL 8	-	Master degrees with course work and a research component	60 credits after SLQL 5 or SLQL 6 which include a research component of minimum 15 credits.
SQL 7	-	Masters Degrees with course work	30 credits after SLQL 5 or SLQL 6
		Postgraduate Diploma	25 credits after SLQL 5 or SLQL 6
		Postgraduate Certificate	20 credits after SLQL 5 or SLQL 6
SQL 6	-	Bachelors Honours/Bachelors in Professional disciplines	120 credits after SLQL 2 or 30 credits after SLQL 5
SQL 5	NVQL 7	Bachelors degree, Bachelor of Technology, Bachelors Double Major, Pundit, Royal Pundit, Nipun	90 credits after SLQL 2 or 60 credits after SLQL 3 or 30 credits after SLQL 4
SQL 4	NVQL 6	National Higher Diploma, Higher Diploma	60 credits after SLQL 2 or 30 credits after SLQL 3
SQL 3	NVQL 5	National Diploma, Diploma	30 credits after SLQL 2
SQL 2	NVQL 4	Advanced Certificate	
SQL 1	NVQL 3 NVQL 2	Certificate	

Level Descriptors

The level descriptors describe the generic nature of learning achievements at each level of the SLQF. These are broad qualitative statements on intended learning outcomes of qualification holders of each level. In some SLQF levels, there are two or more qualifications. This indicates that those qualifications are more or less comparable in terms of expected general levels of learning achievements (Examples: Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2 - Expected general levels of learning achievements (Level 5 and 6)

SLQF LEVEL 5	SLQF LEVEL 6
1. Collect, analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative data	1. Demonstrate a substantive knowledge and understanding of the core aspects of the area of study.
2. Demonstrate problem solving skills in the areas of study.	2. Critically analyze data, make judgments and propose solutions to problems.
3. Develop arguments and make sound judgments in accordance with basic theories and concepts of the areas of study	3. Use practical skills and enquiry efficiently and effectively within the area of study.
4. Present information, ideas, and concepts efficiently and effectively.	4. Construct and sustain arguments and use these arguments, ideas and techniques in problem solving.
5. Apply knowledge and understanding of concepts and principles of the areas of study.	5. Demonstrate awareness of the current developments in the area of study.
6. Acquire new competencies that will enable them to assume major responsibilities.	6. Engage in independent learning using scholarly reviews and secondary sources of information.
7. Demonstrate transferable skills including ICT skills necessary for employment.	7. Communicate information, ideas, issues and solutions efficiently and effectively.
8. Undertake further training and develop additional skills that will enable them to make sound decisions.	8. Exercise initiative, personal responsibility and accountability.
9. Exercise initiative, personal responsibility and accountability.	9. Undertake further training and develop additional skills.
10. Exercise leadership in the professional environment/work place.	10. Exercise leadership in the professional environment/work place.
11. Demonstrate positive attitudes and social responsibility.	11. Demonstrate positive attitudes and social responsibility.

Table 3 - Expected general levels of learning achievements (Level 9 and 10)

SLQF LEVEL 9	SLQF LEVEL 10
1. Create new knowledge through original research of a quality that will satisfy peer review and merit publication.	1. Create new knowledge through original research of a quality that makes a significant contribution to development of the discipline and satisfy peer review and merit Publication.
2. Evaluate and constructively criticize and improve methodologies in the area of specialization.	2. Demonstrate critical reading and analytical skills by critically analyzing synthesizing and evaluating data, making judgments and identifying solutions to problems.
3. Analyze and critically evaluate past and current research in the area of specialization	3. Demonstrate a systematic acquisition and understanding of substantial amount of knowledge in the area of specialization and/or professional practice.
4. Construct new hypotheses and test them in a scientific manner.	4. Conceptualize, design and implement new projects to generate new knowledge and applications.
5. Use practical skills and enquiry efficiently and effectively within the area of study.	5. Respond efficiently and effectively to the changing developmental needs of the discipline.
6. Supervise and guide research to generate new knowledge in the discipline.	6. Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
7. Deal with complex issues systematically and make sound judgments and predictions	7. Supervise and guide original research to generate substantial insight in the discipline.
8. Demonstrate self direction and originality in tackling and solving problems in the professional environment.	8. Make judgments on complex issues in the field of specialization even in the absence of complete data and communicate ideas and conclusions effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
9. Plan and implement tasks efficiently and effectively in professional, technical or academic settings.	9. Identify, conceptualize and provide creative insights to complex issues and problems and demonstrate self-direction and confidence in solving problems.
10. Advance knowledge and understanding and develop additional skills.	10. Exercise high level of autonomy and initiative in professional, administrative and managerial activities.
11. Exercise initiative and personal responsibility and make decisions in complex and unpredictable contexts.	11. Demonstrate leadership and originality in tackling and solving problems.
12. Demonstrate skills in independent learning for continuous professional development.	12. Exercise personal judgment and responsibility in complex and unpredictable situations in professional and/or managerial environments.

Qualification Descriptors of Some Selected Levels

- **Bachelor's Degree**

Specifications:

SLQF Exit level: 5

Minimum total credits: 90

Minimum credits at level 5: 30

Designators:

Bachelors degree designators are limited to broad areas of study and disciplines. Some examples are Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science

Qualifiers:

Maximum two

Examples: Bachelor of Arts in Peace and Conflict Resolution

Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management

Abbreviations:

Examples: BA, BSc, BA (Peace and Conflict Resolution), BSc (EnvMgmt)

Purpose and Characteristics:

The purpose of this qualification is to prepare a graduate with a broad knowledge on theory and methodology of disciplines that enable them to bear responsibility in an academic or professional environment. The qualifications holders should know about the well-established principles in their fields of study and should also be able to apply them where appropriate.

Further, they should be able to use established techniques to initiate and undertake analysis of information and to propose solutions to problems. They should also be able to communicate information effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences and use key techniques of the discipline. They should be able to carry out further training, acquire new competencies, display qualities and skills necessary for employment and exercise personal responsibility in decision making.

Minimum admission requirement:

Minimum admission requirement is the General Certificate of Education (Advanced level) or an equivalent qualification and completion of at least 60 credits of SLQF levels 3 and 4 with a minimum of 30 credits at SLQF Level 4 or equivalent. Completion of NVQF level 6 may also be considered as an equivalent qualification for admission in that field of specialization.

Progression:

Completion of Bachelor General degree meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to SLQF levels 7 and/or 8. If the qualification holder obtains a minimum GPA of 3.0 in the scale of 0-4, he/she may be considered for admission to SLQF level 9 on successful completion of a M.Phil Qualifying examination which will be conducted after completion of 30 credits equivalent to

those of SLQF level 6 in the same or a related subject. A qualification shall not be awarded for early exit from SLQF level 5. However, a Diploma or a Certificate may be awarded for those completing the requirements equivalent to SLQF Levels 4 or 3 respectively.

- **Honours Bachelors Degree**

Specifications:

SLQF Exit Level: 6

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at level 6: 30

Designators:

Honours Bachelors Degree designators are specific and are limited to broad generic areas of discipline or study. Some examples are Bachelor of Arts Honours, Bachelor of Commerce Honours, Bachelor of Business Administration Honours and Bachelor of Science Honours.

Qualifiers:

Maximum two

Examples: Bachelor of Science Honours in Engineering in Mechanical Engineering Bachelor of Arts Honours in Sociology, Bachelor of Science Honours in Chemistry.

Abbreviations:

Examples: BScHons (Eng) (MechEng), BScHons (Chemisty), BAHons (Archaeology), BAHons, BScHons, BComHons, BBAHons

Purpose and Characteristics:

The main purpose of this qualification is to prepare students for research based postgraduate studies. This qualification helps to consolidate and strengthen the student's knowledge in a particular discipline and to develop research capacity and skills in that discipline. This qualification demands high level of theoretical engagement as well as high intellectual independence. Further, these programmes must include a research project in the field of specialization carried out under the guidance and supervision of a qualification holder of level 8, 9 or 10 and reporting in a manner of a dissertation, which will be assessed. The research component should not be less than 8 credits of SLQF level 6. In some areas, Bachelors Special degrees are recognized by an appropriate professional body.

Another purpose of this qualification is to provide a broad education that equips graduates with knowledge, methodology and skills in a particular discipline that enables them to obtain license from appropriate professional bodies in order to demonstrate responsibility in a professional manner.

They should also be able to construct and sustain arguments and solve problems using appropriate ideas and techniques in a professional context.

The qualification holders should be able to demonstrate thorough and systematic understanding of core aspects of the subject of study. They should also have an ability to accurately use the established techniques of analysis within that discipline.

They should be able to clearly communicate information, ideas, issues, problems and solutions to specialist as well as non-specialist audiences. They should also be able to exercise initiative, identify situations where support is needed, carry out further training and manage own learning.

Minimum admission requirements:

Minimum admission requirement is the General Certificate of Education (Advanced level) or an equivalent qualification and completion of 90 credits at SLQF Levels 3, 4 and 5 with a minimum of 15 credits at SLQF Level 5 in the relevant field. Completion of NVQF level 7 may also be considered as an equivalent qualification for admission in that field of specialization.

Progression:

Completion of Honours Bachelors Degree meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to SLQF levels 7 and/or 8, or to SLQF level 9 or 10 after successful completion of a qualifying examination. If the qualification holder possesses a minimum GPA of 3.0 in a scale of 0-4, even without a qualifying examination he/she may be admitted to SLQF level 9 or 10. Bachelors degree of level 5 may be awarded for early exit from Bachelors Honours Degree programme provided that the candidate has completed minimum of 30 credits in levels 5 and/or 6. However, in professional disciplines qualifications may not be awarded for early exit.

Naming of Qualifications

Qualification Type

- The first name given to a qualification
eg. Certificate, Diploma, Bachelors, Honours, Masters etc.

Designator

- The second name given to a qualification and indicates the broad area of study or discipline
eg. Bachelor of Arts, Doctor of Philosophy etc.

The Qualifier

- The third name given to a qualification and it indicates the field of specialization
*eg. Bachelor of Science Honours in Chemistry
BSc (Eng) (Mech. Eng) etc.*

Progression Pathways

One of the objectives of the SLQF is to show the pathways of obtaining different qualifications. The qualifications at different levels are identified considering the learning effort required to obtain that qualification and expected learning outcomes of the qualification holders. Vertical mobility upwards through the system is straight forward and lateral entry is also possible at certain levels. The possible routes of getting qualifications are shown in Fig. 2.

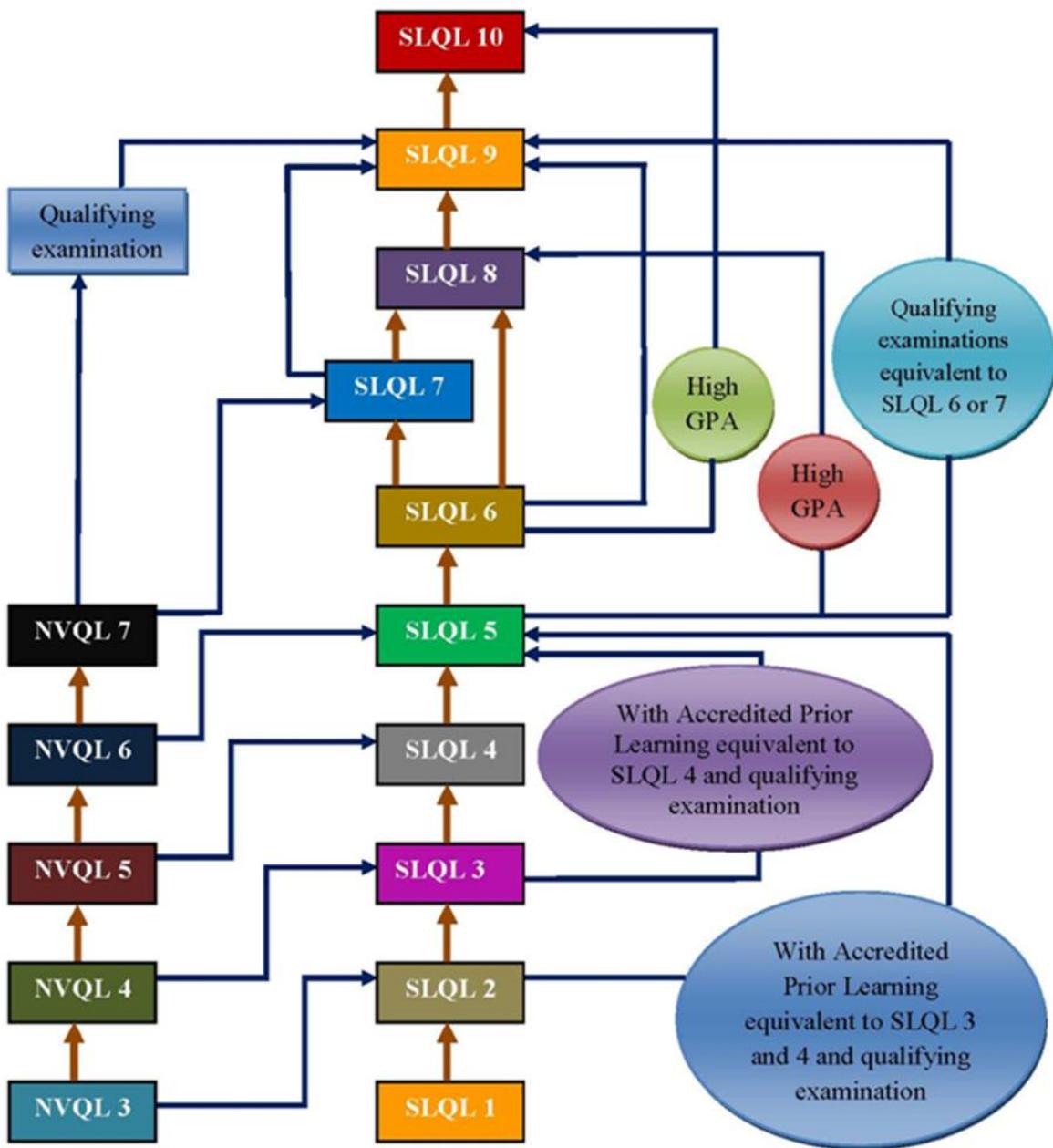


Figure 2 - Progression Pathways

SLQL – Sri Lanka Qualification Level
 NVQL – National Vocational Qualification Level

CONCLUSION

There has been a significant increase in the mobility of learners and academics in the recent past across countries and regions of the world requiring national higher education systems to support and accommodate such developments. In that light Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF) is an important element of systems development in the higher education sector which at the end offers a transparent and coherent frame work for the learner to optimize his/her objective of learning throughout life, while at the same time improving many

vital aspects of learning and assessing the learning process. However, coming out with this framework document is not the end but essentially the first step to establish and operate such a system which would possibly require suitable modifications and adaptations in the process. The establishment of SLQF will help to improve many aspects and processes in the learning and the methods of delivery enhancing the quality of education at home while at the same time it provides a clear system to develop links with higher education institutions abroad.

Reference:

Anon (2013), Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework, Ministry of Higher Education. P.49