
Report
of the
Study Team
on the
Implementation of the
National Qualifications Framework



Department of Education • Department of Labour

April 2002

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Remit and methods of the Study Team

1. The Study Team was given a clear brief by the Ministers of Education and Labour to recommend ways in which the implementation of South Africa's National Qualifications Framework, established in terms of the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 could be streamlined and accelerated.
2. The Study Team undertook a detailed analysis of the current status of the NQF and relevant legislation (chapter 2 and Appendix D), received written and oral submissions from the Departments of Education and Labour, SAQA, statutory bodies and a broad range of role-players (chapter 3), and examined international developments in national qualifications frameworks (chapter 4). On the basis of this preparatory work, the Study Team formulated seven principles to provide a conceptual framework for its analysis and recommendations (chapter 5). The Study Team's recommendations are clustered in four categories: qualifications design and implementation (chapter 6), standards setting and quality assurance (chapter 7), leadership and governance (chapter 8), and resourcing the NQF: funding and capacity (chapter 9).
3. A reader may be struck by the amount and complexity of detail the report contains. This flows from the Study Team's commitment to present as accurately as possible the local and international context of NQF implementation and focus our proposals on the practical details of implementation. To assist readers to keep in mind the bigger picture, the report follows an iterative three-step process:
 - written and oral submissions are used to identify an area of the NQF where implementation could be improved;
 - using the submissions and our understanding of relevant international developments, we propose one or more guiding principles to address the issue; and
 - we make recommendations that would help to streamline the implementation of the NQF.

Current status of the NQF

4. The concept of an NQF emerged in various policy initiatives of the democratic movement prior to 1994 and was given substance in the National Training Strategy Initiative and the RDP. It was regarded as a major innovation of the new democratic government, aiming to bring all learning under a single framework of outcomes-based standards and qualifications. The intention was to widen opportunities for learning and enable prior learning, however achieved, to be recognised so that workers and learners could advance either in education and training or in their career paths. The South African Qualifications Authority Act was passed in 1995, with the joint sponsorship of the Ministers of Education and Labour. The Authority began work in 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework was established by regulation in 1998.
5. The Study Team documents a complex record of activity undertaken by many thousands of South Africans in hundreds of institutions, statutory bodies, organisations and workplaces across the country. By 1999 the SAQA Executive Officer reported that "the NQF is part of the South African psyche". The quality of implementation must be measured, however, by the extent to which and the manner in which the objectives of the NQF are being achieved.

Summary of submissions to the Study Team

6. Without exception, those who made representations to the Study Team supported the overall objectives of the NQF in achieving the transformation of the South African education and training system.
7. However, submissions to the Study Team also indicated strong consensus on many problems of implementing the NQF. There is general dissatisfaction with the pace of implementation especially in respect to access, progression and redress. The architecture of the NQF, embracing policies, regulations, procedures, structures, and language, is experienced as unduly complex, confusing, time consuming and unsustainable. Concerns with the architecture were linked to uncertainty over the respective responsibilities of SAQA and government Ministers and departments, and a perception among many stakeholders of a lack of leadership at all levels.

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8. The proliferation of bodies responsible for standards setting and quality assurance was strongly criticised. Respondents consider that there is an absence of strategic leadership and co-ordination, and confusion over the respective roles of the sponsoring departments and SAQA. This is compounded by inadequate funding from state resources and over-reliance on donor support, despite this being a flagship project of the democratic government. The implementation of the NQF depends on the voluntary involvement of citizens in standards setting structures, and this is not considered to be a permanent recipe for success. Governance structures are criticised for being slow and indecisive. Respondents consider that this stems from a misplaced application of the “stakeholder principle” and failure to give expertise its due. Strong tensions have developed as a result of the overlapping roles of quality assurance bodies accredited by SAQA.
9. Both the DoE and DoL assert that strategic priorities for the NQF must be set, but they present mirror-image perceptions of the current threats to the education and training system from the institutional machinery of NQF implementation. DoL fears that the band ETQAs are seeking undue influence over career focused training, in which they (and the formal system of provision they represent) have little if any experience. According to DoL, quality assured standards and qualifications for labour market related, career focused training are the particular mandate of the SETAs. By contrast, DoE fears that the financial power of the SETAs is already unduly influencing providers in the direction of unit standards-based qualifications without regard for the national policies and plans of the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless each department is against both academic drift and vocational drift in the design of standards and qualifications.
10. The briefing, submissions and consultations demonstrated that there was strong agreement about the key factors that were impeding implementation, and a growing understanding of the basic concepts and practices that were an integral part of implementing South Africa’s NQF. Despite this broad consensus, the Study Team found that when people speak of the NQF it was not always clear exactly what was meant. Four distinct but related meanings could be distinguished:
 - the set of approved unit standards and qualifications, level descriptors and quality assurance guidelines that make up the Framework;
 - all the activities of SAQA;
 - the activities of the whole range of partners and stakeholders involved in development and delivery of standards and qualifications;
 - the achievement of all the objectives of the NQF: an integrated framework of learning achievements, and improved access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development.
11. The Study Team’s view is that the NQF is an important part of the South African system of education and training. It is a means, closely dependent on other means, for achieving major improvements in the education and training system and in so doing accelerating transformation of the nation’s human resource base. Achieving the objectives of the NQF involves far more than setting standards, developing qualifications or successfully implementing the other activities of SAQA, necessary as these are. Where qualifications reforms have been most successful in other countries, they have been linked to institutional reforms, improved resources and a focus on capacity building.
12. The overall perception is that the implementation of the NQF has been unnecessarily slow and that unless changes are made, nation Human Resource Development Strategy targets will not be met and participation in the NQF implementation process will become more tenuous.
13. The strong affirmation of stakeholder support for the NQF and the remarkable degree of consensus in identifying the challenges it faces have enabled the Study Team to propose significant changes that, we believe, will have the support of the vast majority of role-players.

International developments

14. In making its own analysis of the situation and considering solutions, the Study Team has studied the international experience of national qualifications frameworks. The development of NQFs is an international phenomenon, backed by the ILO and UNESCO, which is gathering pace at national, regional and international levels. South Africa is a recognised and respected part of this movement. South Africa's decision to establish an NQF is vindicated by the international record.

15. Several points for consideration emerge from the team's examination of international experience:

- the need for clear and flexible political leadership for NQF development;
- the normality of debate and contestation as new concepts and practices engage the interests of different learning communities and stakeholders;
- the necessity to build communities of trust involving the providers and users of qualifications; and
- the importance of recognising necessary and legitimate differences between learning sectors within one framework.

Conceptual framework for implementation

16. The Study Team analysed international developments, submissions, legislation and the current status of the NQF and developed the following seven guiding principles that underpin the Study Team's analysis and recommendations in the remainder of the report.

1) The NQF is a major vehicle - but not the only one - for the transformation of education and training

Achieving the objectives of the NQF depends on more than the design of qualifications and standards. The NQF is a cornerstone of transformation in education and training but there are other important elements in the edifice of transformation as well.

2) The Departments of Education and Labour should assert their leadership of the NQF

The Departments of Education and Labour working closely with SAQA must exercise strategic leadership of the implementation process. However leadership and a clear division of responsibilities are crucial at all levels of implementation.

3) An overall national plan for NQF implementation is needed that will match resources with NQF objectives

There are several strategies and plans for HRD, skills development and education but no overall national plan for NQF implementation that clearly distinguishes priorities, outcomes, short- and medium-term targets, sequences, resources and responsibilities, and enables the public to appreciate measurable indices of success.

4) The policy on integration of education and training should be reaffirmed and elaborated

The idea that a qualifications framework is integrated means that it is a single framework that includes all qualifications, and that academic and vocational qualifications represent a continuum of education and training, not a division between them.

5) Simplicity, clarity, flexibility and trust should be the hallmarks of successful NQF implementation

The design of qualifications and systems of quality assurance rely on clear criteria that must be amenable to flexible interpretation to ensure fitness for purpose. Building wider communities of trust between providers and users of qualifications is an essential basis for success. Simplicity in language and structure will enhance ownership and participation.

6) The stakeholder principle should be strongly upheld but appropriately applied

The stakeholder principle is essential for legitimacy, accountability and quality. However the identity and role of stakeholders needs to be clarified. Stakeholders and specialists are not necessarily different people, but there is a distinction between the technical process of design and the political function of screening to ensure that NQF criteria are met.

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7) Standards setting and quality assurance should come under the same roof

The SAQA architecture can be streamlined without compromising quality. Standards setting and quality assurance should, wherever possible, be the responsibility of the same body.

Qualifications design and implementation

17. The development of an NQF requires new concepts and new practices. These are frequently perceived as obscure jargon and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. This risk can be minimised by (i) emphasising that the purpose of specialist language is to provide terms such as level and outcome that can be used in relation to a variety of contexts and (ii) ensuring that new terms are introduced only where necessary. Stakeholders and experts have a crucial role in testing the usefulness of any new terms. It is important that the procedures required for standards setting and quality assurance are no more complex than they need to be. The design of qualifications and systems of quality assurance relies not only on clear criteria but also on building communities of trust, and this requires a clear and simple vocabulary and the absence of over-regulation. SAQA's criteria must be capable of being interpreted flexibly.
18. Much of the present complexity and uncertainty stems from the government's and SAQA's commitment to an integrated approach to education and training. The Study Team is of the view that to say a qualifications framework is integrated means that it is a single framework that includes all qualifications. Differences between academic and vocational, professional and occupational qualifications are necessary and defensible. In terms of national policy and increasing international practice, the range of qualifications represents the continuum of education and training, not a division between them.
19. The specifications for unit standards should be interpreted flexibly, as implied in SAQA's guidelines. Unit standards should be devised so as to be easily convertible into corresponding units of learning. An over-reliance on written statements alone should be avoided, and examples should be provided to exemplify satisfactory and unsatisfactory levels of learner achievement.
20. Qualifications based on unit standards and whole qualifications are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education. It may be unnecessary in the longer term to perpetuate the division between these two types of qualification, provided that the concept of unit standards is interpreted flexibly.
21. Qualifications should be fit for purpose. In particular there should be a more explicit acceptance of the need for qualifications of less than 120 credits. The regulations on Fundamental Learning should not be prescriptive but serve as guidance, so as to allow standards setting bodies to take account of the varied needs of learners in different contexts.
22. The NQF should be based on 10 levels reflecting the qualification requirements of the different NQF bands, and additional sub-levels should be avoided, in the interests of simplicity and in line with international practice.
23. Assessment arrangements should be devised taking careful note of the views of teachers and trainers on practicability. They should be supported by a national bank of assessment instruments. Grading of learner achievement is entirely defensible in an outcomes-based system and should be used where appropriate.
24. Critical Outcomes assessment should be clarified by drawing a distinction between the first five Critical Outcomes, which are in principle assessable, and the rest, which are educational aims. Critical Outcomes assessment should where possible be integrated into the core learning and assessment of the qualification, but some learners need to focus on the acquisition of Critical Outcomes skills and will need to be assessed discretely.
25. Generic standards for the first five Critical Outcomes at levels 1-4 should be developed, both to meet the needs of learners who are focussing on the acquisition of skills, and to promote consistency and progression in Critical Outcomes standards.

26. Many submissions expressed disappointment at the slow realisation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or “recognition of current competence”, to cite a helpful term that has come into use elsewhere. RPL implementation should be accorded priority and provided with appropriate incentives and targets. Implementation of RPL should be speeded up through the simplification of standards setting and quality assurance arrangements based on the recognition that the assessment processes for RPL do not differ significantly from “normal” assessment. RPL should be undertaken in a developmental context with the appropriate guidance infrastructure and training for assessors.

Standards setting and quality assurance

27. The submissions raise a number of common concerns about the structural design of the NQF and the standards setting and quality assurance processes. The standards setting process is seen as too cumbersome, slow and inflexible, and not tuned into the diverse needs of the various sectors of the system. The dependence of the standards setting structures on the efforts of volunteers, the lack of appropriate experience, expertise and funding are factors that are frequently mentioned. There has been a proliferation of quality assurance structures with unclear lines of responsibility and different approaches to quality assurance, causing confusion and putting immense pressure on providers and ETQAs alike.

28. The Study Team believes there is sufficient evidence from the submissions across all sectors to warrant urgent changes to the organisational design of the NQF and to the standards setting and quality assurance processes. The Study Team identified seven factors that appear to lie behind the slow progress of NQF development. These are the:

- large number of bodies involved in standards setting and quality assurance;
- size, composition, nature and capacity of the bodies;
- protracted standards setting, consultation and approval process (although recently this has significantly accelerated);
- field focus of the NQF;
- complexity of relationships among the various ETQAs;
- complexity of the quality assurance model; and
- lack of academic guidelines for higher education.

29. The Study Team recommends that new standards setting bodies should become responsible for the technical quality, consultation, accountability and leadership functions currently undertaken by the National Standards Bodies. The National Standards Bodies should be disestablished in a properly phased manner, with care being taken to retain in the NQF system the experience and expertise of NSB members. SAQA's Directorate: Standard Setting and Development would need to be strengthened to take on additional support responsibilities.

30. The SETAs, Council on Higher Education, Department of Education and Department of Labour should be formally recognised as standards setting bodies for their defined areas of interest. They should be charged with making transitional arrangements for the currently recognised SGBs (which would lose that status), for the work being undertaken under their auspices, and for the retention of SGB members' expertise within the system.

31. The new standards setting bodies should have the following responsibilities:

- The SETAs should be recognised as the standards setting bodies for their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 1 to 4 and for unit standards-based qualifications and unit standards in their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 5 and 6.
- The CHE should be recognised as the standards setting body for NQF levels 7, 8, 9 and 10 and for whole qualifications for NQF levels 5 and 6.
- The Department of Education should be recognised as the standards setting body for schooling (grades R-12), technical colleges and ABET non-vocational standards and qualifications.
- The Department of Labour should be recognised as the standards setting body for generic vocational standards.

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- The Department of Education and Department of Labour should be jointly responsible for the development of Critical Outcomes standards.
32. The Study Team noted that SAQA had adopted a principle of separating standards setting from quality assurance on the grounds that combining them could lead to conflicts of interest. The Study Team considers that any benefit from avoiding a risk of conflict of interest is outweighed by the heavy demands that the separation of functions makes on the limited capacity of both sets of organisations, and the organisational confusion that has been experienced. The Study Team considers that standards setting bodies should generally have responsibility for quality assuring their own standards. Standards setting and quality assurance should therefore, wherever possible, be the responsibility of a single body.
33. The CHE and the SETAs should quality assure the standards they generate. In the case of schooling, technical colleges and general ABET standards, however, GENFETQA should undertake quality assurance.
34. A definition of provider accreditation should be adopted to reflect what the term and status means in relation to the NQF. The use of the term accreditation applied to the recognition of ETQAs should be reviewed, but ETQAs should be required to comply with appropriate quality standards that should be monitored by SAQA.
35. An integrated provider accreditation model should be adopted that relies on self-evaluation by providers, up front evaluation of a provider's capability to provide high quality education and training leading to the award of NQF credits for a particular scope of activity, the ongoing monitoring of provider activities, and quality audits. Accreditation of individual programmes should no longer be part of provider accreditation, but it is recognised that professional bodies would continue to undertake programme accreditation where they have a statutory duty to do so or where it is required for international professional recognition. SAQA and the ETQAs should reach agreement on a set of common quality assurance standards and criteria that would make up the Quality Standards for Accredited Education and Training Providers so as to ensure consistency across ETQAs for provider accreditation.
36. A provider should go through one ETQA only for accreditation, depending on the NQF level and the scope of activity. For a multi-purpose provider the quality assurance body should be the band ETQA for the highest NQF level being sought. For a single purpose provider the quality assurance body should be the ETQA responsible for the setting of the standards, or the band ETQA where the standards setter is not also an ETQA.
37. The FET and HE Acts should be amended to bring consistency to the definition of a private institution or provider that is required to register with the Department of Education. The Acts should ensure that:
- providers that offer programmes for national standards and qualifications of less than 120 credits should be required to register; and
 - workplace providers should not be required to register with DoE unless they offer programmes for a fee to the public at large.
38. The present requirements for the accreditation of workplace providers and the registration of assessors are unnecessarily onerous and should be amended as follows:
- Large workplace providers should be required to seek accreditation by the relevant ETQA while small and medium workplace providers should be required only to use registered assessors to award credit for national standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.
 - Assessors employed by an accredited institution or accredited workplace provider should not be required to seek registration as assessors in order to undertake summative assessment to national standards and qualifications.
39. Responsibility for moderation, the registration of assessors, and jurisdiction over the issuing of certificates of award and achievement should be undertaken by the ETQA responsible for the setting of standards or qualifications within its designated area of interest.

40. No additional ETQAs should be accredited and a moratorium should be placed on further applications. The category of social sector ETQAs should be removed and consideration be given to limiting ETQA status to bodies established by statute.
41. The publication of the delayed draft *New Academic Policy* document (drafted by the CHE) indicates an important step forward for NQF implementation in higher education. The document should be finalised without further delay.

Leadership and governance

42. Many submissions stressed the importance of leadership for the successful implementation of the NQF. This view is supported strongly by international experience. The SAQA Act makes the Ministers of Education and Labour joint custodians of the NQF. This means that responsibility for leadership rests squarely with the Departments of Education and Labour, working closely with the South African Qualifications Authority.
43. The two Departments and SAQA must exercise strategic leadership of the implementation process and ensure that short-term objectives and targets that provide measurable indices of success are put in place as part of a national plan for NQF implementation to complement the long-term goals of the NQF. These short-term objectives must be consistent with available resources and capacity.
44. Under the Act, SAQA is the agency responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the NQF, but there is a clear need to institutionalise the strategic leadership role of the two departments, in collaboration with SAQA. The Study Team recommends that a body be established in law, the NQF Strategic Partnership, comprising senior executives from DoE, DoL and SAQA to ensure clear strategic leadership of NQF implementation, to approve and monitor the national plan, and to resolve differences.
45. The SAQA Board should be reconstituted, to comprise not more than 15 members. It should be appointed by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour, on the basis of nominations by stakeholders and the public, against clear criteria to be specified in the Act. The Board should reflect South African norms of representivity, and comprise specialists and experienced practitioners broadly representing the various bands and functional areas of the NQF, with a blend of the skills required to govern the affairs of a major national public enterprise.
46. A key feature of post-apartheid education and training policy is that governance should be based on the active involvement of as wide a section of the community as possible—the stakeholder principle. In practice, stakeholder representivity was seen in many submissions as the major reason for the slowness of the design and registration of standards. Lack of knowledge of specialist areas and especially lack of experience in the design of qualifications based on unit standards were cited as common problems.
47. The Study Team is of the view that the stakeholder principle is important for widening the sense of ownership of the NQF and should be retained. However, it should be clear to whom the term “stakeholder” applies. It is inappropriate to refer to a government department as a stakeholder when under the Constitution it is responsible for implementing the policy of the elected government. Likewise a statutory body has functions prescribed by Parliament and cannot be a stakeholder. Being a stakeholder refers to a body’s interest (stake) in education and training, which includes that body’s experience. Stakeholders rarely if ever exercise delegated powers.

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48. The involvement of stakeholders in the design and delivery of qualifications needs to be managed carefully if confidence in the principle is not to be undermined. Stakeholder involvement has both technical and political aspects which up to now have tended to be conflated. This conflation has led to the delays referred to in many submissions. Technical aspects of qualifications need to be primarily the responsibility of specialists associated with design and assessment, whereas the political aspects refer to the role of the wider body of stakeholders in scrutinising the outcomes of the work of specialists. Furthermore, the principle of stakeholder involvement must be related to the issue of capacity, mandating and reporting.
49. In order to ensure the necessary stakeholder participation in the implementation of the NQF, the Study Team makes three recommendations:
- The new standards setting bodies should undertake their functions by appointing fit for purpose non-permanent standards writing panels in which specialists nominated by appropriate stakeholders, providers and others would be creatively involved.
 - The review and recommendation of standards and qualifications should continue to be undertaken by the standing Standards and Qualifications Committee of SAQA, which should be expected to constitute fit for purpose advisory groups on which appropriate stakeholders would be represented. Stakeholder representation on SAQA's committees should continue to be accepted as a principle.
 - An annual NQF Stakeholder Forum should be established as a venue for the expression of stakeholder interests, to foster interaction with the NQF Strategic Partners, review and recommend policy direction, and provide feedback on the implementation of the NQF plan and SAQA's annual report.
50. At several points in this report the Study Team has drawn attention to deficiencies in the legislative framework of the NQF. That framework extends well beyond the SAQA Act, 1995 itself, as the working paper at Appendix D makes clear. On the whole it amounts to an impressive reinforcement for the objectives of the NQF, but some provisions in the laws are vague or ambiguous, some overlap, some are inconsistent with others, and some have been overtaken by events. Many of the Study Team's proposals would require legislative amendment to become effective. The Study Team therefore proposes that a review and revision of the NQF legislative framework be undertaken on a fully consultative basis as soon as the government has determined its response to this report.

Resourcing the NQF: funds and capacity

51. The implementation of a National Qualifications Framework is a very large undertaking. The sponsoring departments are aware that the government has not yet come to grips with the resource implications of this flagship project. This report provides a new opportunity to engage with the issues and resolve them.
52. The resourcing of the NQF has been a problematic matter from the time of SAQA's establishment in 1997. In terms of the Act, SAQA may be funded by the state, donations, user charges, investments and other sources. In practice the grant allocated in the Department of Education budget has been virtually stable: R5.8 million in the first two years and R6 million since then. The current cost of SAQA's NQF operations is estimated at R42.5 million. The balance has been contributed overwhelmingly by a generous multi-year grant from the European Union, but this will terminate in December 2003. There is an urgent necessity for a review of SAQA's revenue sources.
53. Indispensable and highly valued as donor support has been, SAQA's overwhelming reliance on it to undertake its statutory functions has come at a considerable administrative cost. Perhaps the most significant opportunity cost of donor dependence has been the creative time and effort spent by SAQA's Executive Officer on the management of donor relations, which has complicated the task of strategic leadership and management.

54. Based on the South African evidence and international precedent, the major source of NQF funding should come from Parliamentary appropriations. The changes we are proposing will help streamline NQF operations and improve productivity. The case for a major increase in state provision is very strong. Donor support will be much scaled down in future and should be applied strictly to developmental activities and capacity building, in line with SAQA's practice in utilising bilateral assistance.
55. The Study Team has considered the case for user charges, based on a study undertaken for SAQA. SAQA's proposed income generating strategy was a counsel of desperation, not conviction. There is a case to be made for some aspects of user charges, but they cannot be the main source of funding for the implementation of the NQF. The Study Team endorses reasonable user charges by ETQAs for provider accreditation. Such charges should take into account the wide range of providers' circumstances and should not act as a disincentive to full participation in quality management. The evaluation of external qualifications should continue to yield a valuable fee income. We support the sale of SAQA's information products to clients at prices that would not drive learners and employers away from the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). But we see no merit in the proposals for compulsory fee charges suggested in SAQA's proposed income generating strategy.
56. In principle the NQF is a high profile government programme (widely endorsed by stakeholders and providers) to facilitate the transformation of education and training and the national HRD Strategy. Quality management is inherently costly. It is appropriate that the costs should be shared, but the government is rightly expected to demonstrate its full commitment to the NQF by making available a commensurate share of public funds for its implementation.
57. SAQA's budget process has left much to be desired. The budget has not been strategised in advance with senior officials responsible for budget policy and planning in the Department of Education. Moreover, the National Treasury has never been engaged at a strategic level with respect to the overall priority, cost structure and trajectory of NQF implementation. It appears that the SAQA budget (which is to say, NQF implementation) has lacked informed advocates both within the Department of Education and in the crucial interactions with the Treasury. There are strong indications that the Department of Education is aware of this state of affairs and is anxious to correct it.
58. The Study Team proposes an integrated approach to NQF financing, undertaken by the NQF Strategic Partnership in collaboration with the National Treasury. The basis would be the government's obligation to ensure the success of NQF implementation. The changes we have proposed in standards setting and quality assurance should significantly reduce SAQA's direct costs for these activities. If the Study Team's proposals were accepted, the permanent organs of NQF implementation would comprise SAQA, the CHE, GENFETQA, the SETAs, statutory professional bodies and the Departments of Education and Labour. The funding model required for NQF implementation resolves itself as follows:
- The DoE makes provision for:
 - the annual grant to SAQA, taking into account its streamlined responsibilities and identified priorities, and its limited revenue potential from sale of information products, fees for evaluation of external qualifications and targeted grants from donors;
 - the annual grant to CHE, taking into account the HEQC's needs as an ETQA (offset by its revenue from accreditation fees) as well as the CHE's new role as a standards setting body;
 - the annual grant to GENFETQA in respect of its quality assurance function, taking into account its somewhat limited potential for accreditation fee income; and
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoL.
 - The DoL makes provision for:
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoE;
 - an annual grant to SETAs to support the administrative costs of their standards setting activities; and
 - ensuring that SETAs are funded for their ETQA responsibilities, taking into account their revenue potential from provider accreditation.

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- The NSA makes provision for:
 - annual grants to the SETAs to cover their standards setting requirements.
- Statutory professional bodies make provision for:
 - their standards setting activities; and
 - their ETOA responsibilities.

59. Capacity building has been a theme of the submissions to the Study Team. It has been a priority of SAQA whose efforts have been highly praised. Successful implementation of the NQF would require the development of skills and capacities for standards setting, assessment (including for RPL) and quality assurance within the NQF structures as well as among the provider community. In the next phase of implementation this is a priority second to none.

60. Even in a simplified system the need for committed, able and experienced participants will remain high. Special efforts will be needed to ensure that South Africa's NQF makes best use of all the available talent. SAQA's current staff complement of about 80 is modest in relation to its national mandate and in comparison with bodies in other countries that have similar or equivalent functions. The scale and complexity of SAQA's responsibilities and the seniority of its interactions across the education and training, business and labour environments require it to be an apex national organisation in staff calibre and intellectual culture as well as being highly focussed on its supportive and facilitative role.

61. It may be that a full-scale operational review needs to be undertaken, especially in the light of the new challenges that SAQA would face if the Study Team's proposals were accepted.

62. The Study Team believes that two components of SAQA's organisation would need urgent support. We mentioned earlier that the Directorate: Standard Setting and Development would need to be strengthened, not reduced, in order to support the work of the new standards setting bodies. The Directorate: Quality Assurance and Development would also need additional capacity to ensure that the assessment agenda, including RPL, is given the highest possible priority in NQF implementation.

63. The NQF Strategic Partnership should take under review the staff capacity needs of the new standards setting bodies and ETOAs as well as SAQA if the Study Team's proposals were accepted. This would need to be linked to the integrated budget exercise for NQF implementation.

64. SAQA has won high praise for its capacity building initiatives, supported through technical co-operation agreements. The Department of Labour and the National Skills Authority, as well as the Department of Education in co-operation with the Business Trust and other NGOs, also have a wide array of donor-supported capacity building projects geared to the provider system. All of these have probably not been mapped across the system and the NQF Strategic Partnership provides a vehicle to undertake such an exercise and determine how the values and objectives of the NQF could be better served through co-ordinated provider support across a broad front.

65. Since only a small minority of all providers could be directly involved, ways should be found to enable the wider provider community to become oriented to the new array of standards and qualifications, especially by making assessment materials available.

Conclusion

66. In concluding the report, the Study Team affirms the significance of the NQF in relation to the advancement of quality learning in the nation and the national Human Resource Development Strategy. The objectives of the NQF are as valid now as they were in 1995. Major development has taken place. The team's proposals will help provide clear direction, clarify roles, release new energies and enthusiasm, and lift implementation to a new level.

67. The National Qualifications Framework was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create. The NQF is a transformatory project, closely identified with the objective of ridding South Africa of its apartheid legacy and opening the doors of learning to all. This accounts for much of the passion that is invested in NQF implementation, and also for the depth of the disappointment that so few signs of progress are yet apparent.
68. All has not been well between the two government sponsors of the NQF, and at times SAQA has felt somewhat bereft of material and moral support. Our proposals, including the establishment of the NQF Strategic Partnership, have been designed to address the points of contention in these relationships. They show how essential sectoral interests could be protected while the NQF's integrative mission was upheld. A jointly prepared national plan for NQF implementation should for the first time provide targets and indicators of progress across the system. It should make clear the relationship between the NQF and the national Human Resource Development Strategy.
69. The DoE, DoL and the National Treasury will be required to attend to another important need, the new funding model for the NQF. This is most urgent because time has run out on the present arrangements. The new funding model reflects the new architecture we propose for the standards setting and quality assurance components of the NQF. The new arrangements would at a stroke douse many of the tensions and resentments that have smouldered (and at times ignited) as SAQA has moved from one stage of implementation to the next.
70. Of all the leading exponents of national qualifications frameworks South Africa has the least mature learning system, the greatest social disparities and the most acute capacity problems. Yet is striking how often, given a choice, South Africans have chosen the most austere and demanding option. Though such decisions have been made with the most honourable of intentions, cumulatively they have put the NQF under terrific stress and, in retrospect, provoked the circumstances that brought the Study Team into being.
71. The team has had the privilege of learning at close quarters what SAQA has achieved in its five years of operation, and we have developed a keen sense of the commitment and energy that has been invested in every aspect of the NQF development and implementation processes. We have given full weight to the voices of our respondents and the suggestive experience of other countries.
72. Our proposals are designed to reconcile the needs of the different learning communities and help bind each of them to the objectives of the NQF in its own way. There is great need to infuse the NQF with trust and mutual respect. We place emphasis on the importance of communities of trust in which providers and users of qualifications develop a common understanding. We consider that qualifications and standards on their own are but instruments to facilitate learning, and that curriculum and pedagogy and assessment form the cornerstones of the national learning system and must be given their due.
73. In conclusion, we draw attention to the two priorities of NQF implementation that must claim the most serious attention:
- the development of a plan for assessment reform including RPL; and
 - the necessity for wide-ranging and sustained capacity building throughout the NQF system, with particular attention to the needs of providers.
74. Our last word is reserved for something outside our terms of reference, but vital to the success of the HRD Strategy and the broad objectives of the NQF. We refer to the total insufficiency of provision for diversified skills development in the FET band, both present and projected, and also at the interface between Further and Higher Education and Training. We trust the NQF Strategic Partnership will increase the visibility of this need and mobilise support for it to be met.

PREFACE

We are honoured by our appointment to study the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. In undertaking our task we were cognisant of the importance the Ministers of Education and Labour have placed on the critical role of the NQF in the broader transformation of the South African education and training system. As our society emerges from its racially based and fragmented past, the transforming education and training system has a central role in the reconstruction and development of the post-apartheid state.

We have consulted widely and we gratefully acknowledge the frank contributions by the Departments of Education and Labour, the SAQA executive and SAQA sub-structures, statutory bodies and many stakeholder bodies. We thank all who took the trouble and time to write to us and meet us.

We thank the Department of Education for the logistical, financial, secretarial and research support it provided during the course of our work. We express our gratitude to the Executive Officer and staff of SAQA who have been most responsive to our needs, free with information and frank in their advice. SAQA also made their boardroom and administrative services available to us for our first two meetings. It is no easy matter to be subject to an external scrutiny of this kind, and we pay tribute to the professional manner in which the Executive Officer and his colleagues have engaged with us from the outset.

It was both a pleasure and privilege to work with the members of the team in bringing this exercise to a conclusion. The discourse and debate during its work was always interesting and intense. In a diverse team one expects differences of views and even tension at times, but we were united in our determination to engage with the evidence and find solutions that put the national interest first.

For all of us the study of the NQF has been an exhilarating and challenging learning experience. We express our gratitude to the Ministers of Education and Labour for providing us with the opportunity to engage with the NQF process. We trust that we have discharged our responsibility, and that our report will contribute to the acceleration of the implementation of the NQF and the realisation of its objectives.



Jairam Reddy
Chairperson
NQF Study Team

March 2002

NQF STUDY TEAM



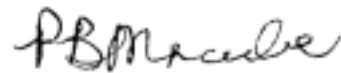
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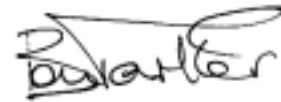
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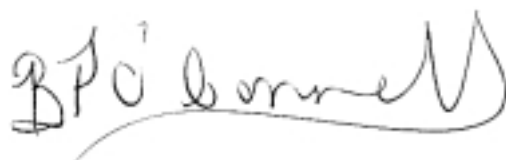
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These acknowledgements complement the broader expressions of appreciation in the Chairperson's Preface.

The following Department of Education staff members gave invaluable assistance to the Study Team: Beatrice Terblanche and Sue Opperman, who managed all the logistical arrangements and much else; Christa Möller, Helen Mosiatlhaga, Ayanda Jijana and Johannes Sadiki who rendered administrative support and set up video conference facilities when required; Udo Boesenberg and Martie Barnard who sorted out budget and claims matters respectively; Ghaleeb Jeppie and Richard Ndaba for facilitating grant support; Dr Louis Kriel who was the team's assiduous recording secretary throughout; Nasima Badsha and Duncan Hindle who generously made available office facilities and the time of their personal assistants; Khetsi Lehoko for releasing staff time. Ihron Rensburg facilitated the setting up of the Study Team before his departure from the Department.

Adrienne Bird of the Department of Labour provided important advice and liaison.

Dr Berene Kramer of SAQA was the team's always helpful and knowledgeable point of contact with the Authority for logistical and professional support.

The Study Team expresses its warm appreciation for the excellent service given by all these colleagues.

The costs of the study have been generously supported by a grant from the British Department for International Development, in terms of its programme of assistance to education policy development and transformation in South Africa.

PART ONE

REMIT AND METHODS OF THE STUDY TEAM

Objectives of the NQF

The South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995) was the first law of the new democratic Parliament aimed at designing a national learning system. The Ministers of Education and Labour jointly sponsored the SAQA Act on the strength of a policy document and draft Bill prepared by an Inter-Ministerial Working Group. The Act thus embodies the government's integrated approach to education and training.

The Act establishes SAQA as a statutory body responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. The objectives of the NQF are to:

- a. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- b. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- c. enhance the quality of education and training;
- d. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- e. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. (section 2)

The NQF is thus regarded as a central instrument for the transformation of the country's deeply fragmented and unequal education and training system, aiding the process of opening up learning opportunities for the disadvantaged, and ensuring learners' progression through articulated qualification levels and coherent career paths.

Why the Study Team was appointed

The achievements of the NQF are widely recognised and extensively documented in this report. However, as is to be expected with a programme of such magnitude, questions have arisen about the way in which the NQF is being implemented and whether its objectives are being fulfilled.

An introductory briefing meeting with senior officials of the Departments of Education and Labour explained the background to the study and the issues that needed to be addressed. The officials acknowledged that most people, across all constituencies, who had been directly involved in the development of the NQF exhibited a high degree of ownership and pride in it. Nevertheless during 2000 "a broad malaise of discontent with the NQF and SAQA" had taken hold among stakeholders and it was felt helpful to take stock of the situation and review the way forward. A record of this helpful meeting is at Appendix C.

As the second post-apartheid government plans for accelerated, targeted service delivery, the Ministers of Education and Labour wanted to know what actions might be taken to sharpen, speed up and strengthen the implementation of the NQF. To this end, after consulting with SAQA, they appointed a team comprising experts and practitioners within the education, training and economic sectors, international experts and local researchers to conduct a "focussed study on the development of the NQF in an informal but rigorous manner". The list of members of the Study Team is at Appendix A.

The Ministers explicitly stated that the study was not aimed at reversing the establishment and goals of the NQF but should focus on:

- relevant contemporary international developments of national qualifications frameworks with reference to policies, regulatory frameworks and implementation procedures;
- the match between policy objectives and outcomes, and providers' and learners' experiences and attitudes to the implementation of the NQF;
- the extent to which SAQA has put in place the appropriate and relevant policies, procedures, delivery systems, other resources and capacities for the establishment of the NQF and implementing relevant mandates of the Ministers on education and training and how SAQA's operations could be improved;

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- how to address the concerns of key social partners and stakeholders about an apparent proliferation of bodies and procedures, and an apparent fragmentation of roles and responsibilities in the areas of quality assurance and national standards development; and
- any other obstacles to streamlining the implementation of the NQF.

The full terms of reference are at Appendix B.

The team's working procedures

The full Study Team met on seven occasions and two smaller consultative meetings were held for a total of 24 meeting days between July 2001 and February 2002. Between meetings the team corresponded extensively by e-mail.

At its first meeting in July 2001 the team analysed the terms of reference, received an intensive two-day briefing by the Executive Officer and senior management of SAQA, and formulated its work plan. This involved:

- inviting written submissions from the public and all relevant stakeholders through press advertisements and written invitations;
- arranging consultations with the sponsoring Departments of Education and Labour, SAQA sub-structures, statutory bodies responsible to the Ministers of Education and Labour respectively, and all relevant stakeholders;
- holding a consultative meeting with the chairpersons of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committees of Education and Labour;
- meeting the chairpersons of National Standards Bodies, and the chairpersons of SAQA's NSB and ETQA Sub-Committees;
- conducting studies on a range of matters that are central to the terms of reference, including relevant international experience with national qualifications frameworks, legislation affecting the NQF, and several important issues raised by stakeholders; and
- consulting other relevant literature on qualifications frameworks.

A working paper for the Study Team on the NQF legislative framework is at Appendix D. Lists of written submissions received, persons interviewed and documents consulted are appended to the report at Appendices E, F and G.

The written submissions, records of consultations, studies and relevant literature were analysed and intensively discussed in the meetings of the Study Team. The evidence, the issues and the likely implications of our findings and recommendations were vigorously debated by the team and in all cases tested against the key question: "How do we speed up the implementation of the NQF?" The evidence, the issues, our findings and our recommendations are set out in the following pages of the report.

A reader may be struck by the amount and complexity of detail the report contains. This flows from the Study Team's commitment to present as accurately as possible the local and international context of NQF implementation and focus our proposals on the practical details of implementation. The report is not a general policy document but rather a set of carefully argued recommendations for practical improvements, supported by seven guiding principles that we present in chapter 5.

To assist readers to keep in mind the bigger picture, the report follows an iterative three-step process:

- Written and oral submissions are used to identify an area of the NQF where implementation could be improved.
- Using the submissions and our understanding of relevant international developments, we propose one or more guiding principles to address the issue.
- We make recommendations that would help to streamline the implementation of the NQF.

THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE NQF

Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework is one of the distinctive programmes of the democratic transformation of South Africa. Its origins lie in the 1970s and 1980s, in the struggle for workers' rights to a living wage and to education and training, and the United Democratic Front's campaign for democratic education following the Soweto massacre of school children and the two states of emergency.

In the pre-democracy period after the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of the liberation movements, the idea of a comprehensive and bold National Qualifications Framework emerged as an appropriate means of transforming education and training. The NQF idea became a point of convergence for organisations representing different interests and political orientations and resonated with a diverse range of contemporary thought on education and training policy. It was characteristic of South Africa's transition to democracy that people of different political persuasions, bodies working within the formal schooling, training and higher education sectors, public servants and organised business and labour were able to find a strategic patch of common ground.

Corporate interests, especially in the mining industry, and the authors of the apartheid government's Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) discussion document promoted different approaches to national qualifications systems. The ANC and COSATU found common cause in a "high participation, high skill" HRD strategy advocating a single Ministry for education and training and the notion of a ladder-like qualifications framework with credit transfer to foster learner and worker mobility. The democratic movement's National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) report considered that "systemic articulation appears to be the best way to facilitate equity under conditions of differentiation" and weighed the merits of a "unified statutory qualifications board, charged with responsibility for monitoring and validation of all qualifications".⁽¹⁾

The substance of the NQF proposal was ultimately negotiated in Committee 2 of the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) Task Team after the apartheid regime's National Training Board had been radically re-structured under intense pressure from organised labour backed by leading organised business players. The NQF idea received the support of organised labour, organised business, mass democratic movement structures, the education NGO community and the relevant public officials who were working with these bodies in anticipation of the democratic transition.⁽²⁾

The NQF was included as a major element in the ANC's *Policy Framework for Education and Training* and the *Implementation Plan for Implementation and Training*, as well as the proposals for human resource development in the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* of the ANC Alliance. Like the NTSI report, both documents were produced prior to the 1994 elections on the basis of research and wide consultation. The RDP policy framework document explained the concept as follows:

"An integrated qualifications framework. By establishing a national qualifications framework which integrates all elements of the education and training system, we must enable learners to progress to higher levels from any starting point. They must be able to obtain recognition and credits for qualifications and toward qualifications from one part of the system to another. The system must enable assessment and recognition of prior learning and skills acquired through experience. To this end curricula should cut across traditional divisions of skill and knowledge."⁽³⁾

The NQF featured in two of the Mandela government's earliest policy documents, the white papers on the RDP and on education and training. An Inter-Ministerial Working Group was set up by the new Ministers of Education and Labour to draft the legislation that was subsequently enacted by Parliament as the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995).⁽⁴⁾

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During the parliamentary process there was a flurry of concern from the associations of university and technikon principals. The higher education constituency considered itself to have been under-represented in the preparatory work for the NQF and was intent on safeguarding institutional rights. Suitable language was found and the Bill was passed with the unanimous support of all political parties.⁽⁵⁾

This chapter documents the current status of the NQF in the light of its brief history. It sets out to explain the terminology in use, and the functions and inter-relationships of the many structures that have been established in terms of the SAQA Act and other Acts that bear on the NQF. It describes the current status of NQF implementation in order to provide sufficient context to illuminate the issues that are raised in chapter 3 and the comparable developments in other countries discussed in chapter 4. This chapter does not attempt an evaluation of NQF developments, since that is undertaken elsewhere in the report.

What is the National Qualifications Framework?

SAQA's documents explain the NQF in more than one way. For example:

"The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a Framework on which standards and qualifications, agreed to by education and training stakeholders throughout the country, are registered."⁽⁶⁾

"[The] NQF is the set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning."⁽⁷⁾

"The NQF is a social construct whose meaning has been and will continue to be negotiated by the people, for the people. It is a lifelong learning system that brings together South Africans from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds representing a variety of worldviews, thinking, practice and experience to negotiate and define quality through the synthesis of these."⁽⁸⁾

The first statement corresponds to the meaning in the SAQA Act. The second statement shifts the notion of "framework" from qualifications to records of achievement, but is consistent with the purpose of the Act. The third statement conveys a theory about the NQF, incorporating a notion of quality in education and training as a negotiated good that is in line with contemporary views on quality systems in other sectors.⁽⁹⁾

The SAQA Act, 1995 uses sparing language to describe the NQF. Five related elements can be distinguished.

Firstly, a *definition* of the NQF is given (section 1 of the Act). It is simply a framework approved by the Minister on which national standards and qualifications are registered.

Secondly, five *objectives* of the Framework are described (section 2). They summarise what the advocates of the NQF idea had campaigned for and reflect what the new government's white papers had endorsed.

- An integrated national framework of learning achievements will be created.
- Access, mobility and progression within education and training and in employment will be facilitated.
- The quality of education and training will be enhanced.
- Redress of educational and job opportunities will be accelerated.
- Personal, social and economic development will be advanced.

Third, the *development* and *implementation* of the NQF are made the responsibility of SAQA, which is given three main professional functions to perform (section 5(1)). SAQA must:

- oversee the (conceptual) development of the NQF, and formulate and publish policies and criteria for registering standards setting bodies and accrediting bodies to undertake quality assurance of learning achievements;

- oversee the implementation of the NQF, including registering standards bodies and accrediting quality assurers, registering national standards and qualifications, ensuring that accredited quality assurers comply with the requirements for accreditation, and ensuring that South Africa's registered standards and qualifications are internationally comparable; and
- advise the Minister on matters affecting the registration of standards and qualifications.

SAQA is also authorised to perform any other function designated by the Minister that is relevant to the NQF (section 7(3)).

Fourthly, the *manner* in which the NQF is to be developed and implemented is specified (sections 5(2)). The Authority must pursue the objectives of the NQF and perform its functions

- in a consultative manner and in co-operation with all state departments, stakeholders, providers and certifying bodies that will be affected by the NQF; and
- with due regard for the respective national and provincial legislative spheres under the Constitution, and the statutory rights of universities and technikons.

The Authority may "cause research to be done" that is relevant to its functions (section 7(4)).

Fifthly, the NQF may be *regulated* by SAQA with the approval of the Minister (section 14).

In brief, the Act provides no more than a schema. SAQA itself is given the task of overseeing the design and operationalisation of the NQF, and advancing its objectives, in consultation and co-operation with state departments, stakeholders and providers.

Policy and legislative context

Before the 1994 elections the African National Congress intended to establish a single Ministry of Education and Training in order to have "an effective and responsive organisation to manage change". A single ministry has not been created. Instead, the government has advanced the objective of a learning society by the combined actions of the Departments of Education and Labour, each of which is committed to an integrated approach to education and training.⁽¹⁰⁾

In broad terms, the Department of Labour is responsible for managing and stimulating the demand for labour-market related education and training, while the Department of Education (together with its provincial counterparts) has overall responsibility for the supply and quality of education and training services at all levels. In combination the two Departments have put in place a formidable set of complementary policies, legislative instruments, strategy documents and plans aimed at replacing the apartheid legacy with an entirely new structure of provision, governance, funding, curriculum, assessment and certification fit for a 21st century African democracy. Together these measures cover the NQF, schools, ABET, FET and HET, skills development (including learnerships or new apprenticeships) for people in employment and those seeking jobs or self-employment, and a national human resource development strategy. In 1999 a former SAQA chairperson described the new laws as "great mansions for the spirit of the NQF".⁽¹¹⁾

The following Acts make specific provision for the NQF:

- National Education Policy Act [NEPA], 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996) provides directive principles for Ministerial policy on all education other than universities and technikons. Policy for curriculum, learning standards, examinations, certification, monitoring and evaluation is made subject to the SAQA Act. RPL is supported.
- Mine Health and Safety Act, 1996 (Act No. 29 of 1996) establishes the Mining Qualifications Authority and provides a complete apparatus for standards setting and quality assurance in one economic sector in terms of the NQF.

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- Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) as amended defines higher education in terms of the NQF, establishes the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) for quality promotion and quality assurance. The HEQC is deemed to be an accredited Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA) and required to comply with relevant SAQA policies and criteria.
- Further Education and Training [FET] Act, 1998 (Act No. 98 of 1998) requires the Director-General to promote quality assurance in FET subject to NEPA and the SAQA Act. The FET Act is to be administered as a complement to the national skills development strategy in co-operation with the Department of Labour.
- Skills Development Act [SDA], 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998) establishes Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) which must immediately seek accreditation with SAQA as ETQAs and must be accredited within 18 months. The SDA must be interpreted to support the objectives of SAQA.
- Council for the Built Environment [CBE] Act, 2000 (Act No. 43 of 2000) empowers the CBE in consultation with professional councils to obtain recognition for the councils as SGBs under the SAQA Act.
- Architectural Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 44 of 2000) and five other built environment professional council Acts contain provision for quality assurance and standards setting in terms of the HE and SAQA Acts.
- Adult Basic Education and Training Act, 2000 (Act No. 52 of 2000) requires quality assurance and promotion in ABET to be undertaken subject to the SAFCERT Act, 1986 (since repealed and succeeded by the GENFETQA Act, 2001). The ABET Act is to be administered as a complement to the national skills development strategy in co-operation with the Department of Labour.
- General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance [GENFETQA] Act, 2001 (Act No. 58 of 2001) establishes the GENFETQA Council “which must be regarded as having been accredited” by SAQA as an ETQA for all schools, FET and ABET institutions covered by the education Acts. The Council must nevertheless meet SAQA's requirements for accreditation, and must perform its functions subject to the SAQA Act, NEPA and Ministerial directives. An object of the Act is to regulate the relationship between DoE, SAQA, other ETQAs and the Council.⁽¹²⁾

The Departments of Education and Labour agree that the first main post-apartheid goal of transforming the policy and institutional landscape is well on the way to being accomplished. Their action programmes focus on implementation, achieving enhanced access by learners and workers to high quality education and training.⁽¹³⁾

Despite the advances in democracy and development since 1994, the structural race and gender inequalities in South African society persist. South Africa has one of the world's most distorted distributions of personal income. Inward investment and economic growth are low despite macro-economic and fiscal stability. Middle- and high-level skills are scarce. Unemployment is high and rising as the structure of the workforce is adjusted under the pressures of globalisation. Endemic poverty and disease (especially HIV/AIDS) are driving down life expectancy at birth and driving up infant mortality, as well as sapping labour force productivity and severely impairing educational progress in many communities.

The national HRD strategy is premised on the assumption that co-ordinated planning, implementation and monitoring of education and training provision in response to labour market demand and social needs, will help improve productivity and economic competitiveness, raise the country's human development indices, and enhance the quality of South African life.⁽¹⁴⁾

From the outset of the new government, the NQF has been regarded as both a transformative instrument to “expand the ways in which people are able to acquire learning and qualifications of high quality” and as “a key element of human resource development strategy”. SAQA's mission – “to ensure the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework which contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large” – speaks to this large policy context.⁽¹⁵⁾

Board, executive and business plans

The members of the Authority are colloquially referred to as “the Board”. The Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour appoints all members. The SAQA Act provides detailed specifications for the nomination of members, based largely on constituency representation, as follows:

- one by the Director-General: Education
- one by the heads of provincial education departments
- one by the Director-General: Labour
- one by the National Training Board⁽¹⁶⁾
- two each by organised labour and organised business
- one each by the bodies representing principals of universities, technikons, technical colleges, teachers’ colleges and other colleges respectively
- one each by the national bodies representing ABET, early childhood development and special education needs respectively
- two by the organised teaching profession
- two by national bodies representing lecturers and trainers

The Ministers may agree to appoint up to six additional members at their discretion and not more than two members recommended for co-option by the Authority. Together with the Chairperson and the Executive Officer the Authority numbers a maximum of 30.

Members other than the Executive Officer are appointed for a three-year term and may not serve more than two terms. Members are not remunerated, but with Ministerial approval the chairperson may be.⁽¹⁷⁾

The first board commenced work in mid-1996 and the second board’s term of office will end on 30 November 2002. There is an executive committee and five standing committees, as follows:

- Executive Committee, chaired by the Authority Chairperson and comprising members of the Authority representing DoE, DoL, organised business, organised labour, and the chairpersons of the NSB, ETQA and Finance Committees
- NSB Sub-Committee
- ETQA Sub-Committee
- Finance Committee, chaired by the Authority Chairperson
- Audit Committee, chaired by the Finance Committee chairperson and comprising a majority of external members
- SAQA/EU Project Steering Committee, chaired by the Authority Chairperson.

In addition an IT Advisory Committee acts as a stakeholder forum. The Executive Officer is a member ex officio of all board committees.

SAQA’s executive operations comprise the Executive Office and six directorates:

- Standard Setting and Development
 - Standard Setting
 - Recording and Information
 - Logistics
- Quality Assurance and Development
 - ETQAs
 - Centre for Evaluation of External Qualifications
- Strategic Support
 - Communications
 - Secretariat
 - Resource and Information Centre
 - Research

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- Information and Information Technology
 - National Learners' Records Database
 - IT
- Human Resources
- Finance.

The present Executive Officer, who took office in early 1997, has led the organisation from the outset.⁽¹⁸⁾

At the end of 2001 the SAQA executive comprised 81 approved posts. It is expected to grow to 109 during the next five years as funding permits.⁽¹⁹⁾

The work of the organisation has been undertaken in terms of a five-year business plan, approved by the Minister, for the period April 1997-March 2002. Following a strategic review of what has been achieved SAQA has prepared and submitted to the Minister of Education a second business plan covering April 2002-March 2007. SAQA's operating assumption has been that it must be an excellent organisation of high standing. The Authority commits itself to the principles of openness, integrity and accountability reflected in the King Code of Corporate Practices and Conduct. The business operations of SAQA are outcomes-based and the organisation's budgets are related strictly to the business plan and the achievement of the objectives of the NQF. Annual budgets are submitted to the Minister of Education for approval. All SAQA's financial statements have received unqualified audit reports from the Auditor-General.⁽²⁰⁾

The SAQA Act, 1995 provides that the Authority will be funded from five sources:

- appropriations by Parliament "for the achievement of the objectives of the Act"
- fees charged for the granting of any registration or accreditation or any other service provided by the Authority
- loans
- donations, contributions or royalties
- interest on investments.⁽²¹⁾

Thus far SAQA has relied on its Parliamentary grant (via the Department of Education's budget) and donor support from the European Union. The Department of Education granted R5.8 million in 1997/98 and 1998/99, and R6.0 million in 1999/2000 and 2000/01. As the implementation of the NQF has progressed, the proportion of the government grant to SAQA's total annual expenditure has declined. In 2000/01 it amounted to 22 per cent of the total. The balance has been made up very largely by a grant of €14 million agreed in 1998 in terms of the European Programme for Reconstruction and Development in South Africa. This grant support will terminate at the end of December 2003 and is conditional upon arrangements being made before that date for SAQA's financial sustainability. The EU support is targeted towards the achievement of several of SAQA's "key deliverables" (standards setting, registration of qualifications and quality assurance) and organisational growth and development.⁽²²⁾

SAQA has also benefited from highly targeted assistance towards its organisational development and programme activities from the bilateral development agencies of Canada, Denmark, Germany and the United States, as well as the British Council, NUFFIC (Netherlands) and the Ford Foundation.⁽²³⁾

In the five years from 1997 to 2001 SAQA has made significant progress in its oversight of the development and implementation of the NQF, as required by the SAQA Act, 1995. The main areas of work have been establishing the NQF, conceptual and architectural design, standards setting and qualifications registration, quality assurance, and the recording of learner achievements. Each will be discussed in turn.

Establishing the NQF

The Minister of Education, in consultation with the Minister of Labour, established the NQF on 28 March 1998 “to provide for the registration of national standards and qualifications”. The present Framework comprises eight levels, of which Levels 1 and 8 are open-ended. The levels are grouped in three bands. Level 1 (and below) comprises the General Education and Training band, and contains three sub-levels for ABET. Levels 2-4 comprise the Further Education and Training band, and levels 5-8 the Higher Education and Training band.

For purposes of setting and registering standards and qualifications the NQF is divided into 12 organising fields, and a National Standards Body (NSB) has been established for each field as follows:

- 01 Agriculture and Nature Conservation
- 02 Culture and Arts
- 03 Business, Commerce and Management Studies
- 04 Communication Studies and Language
- 05 Education, Training and Development
- 06 Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
- 07 Human and Social Studies
- 08 Law, Military Science and Security
- 09 Health Sciences and Social Services
- 10 Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences
- 11 Services
- 12 Physical Planning and Construction

SAQA, in consultation with the NSBs, has the task of prescribing level descriptors to ensure coherence across fields in the allocation of qualifications and standards to particular levels, and to aid international comparability.⁽²⁴⁾

The formulation of level descriptors has been a particularly protracted and vexed task, largely because of differences between SAQA and the higher education community in respect of levels 5-8. Two groups have debated the issues: the SAQA level descriptors task team, and the task team on academic policy of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). There are many facets to the debate, but the underlying problem has been the different perspectives from which each side has approached the issues. SAQA exercises responsibility for the whole Framework, and is particularly concerned with the need to facilitate access and progression into ABET, FET and entry-level HET, where the national skills deficit is greatest. The higher education community requires a Framework that reflects and facilitates a diversity of programmes and qualifications in the HET band and feels that an eight-level Framework is unnecessarily restrictive, especially for postgraduate study and research.

Both the level descriptors and academic policy documents are of major importance and have been long awaited. Each has been stalled by the other because they are inter-dependent. SAQA is required by its Act to consult, to act co-operatively and to take the rights of higher education institutions into account. The CHE operates under the HE Act, which defines higher education in terms of the NQF, which in turn is established in terms of the SAQA Act. Each party needs the other in order to progress.

Intensive debate and a working agreement between the two task teams resulted in December 2001 in the simultaneous release for public comment of both draft documents. Each incorporates a provisional negotiated compromise, for the sake of the consultative process, to peg Bachelor's degrees at level 7 and open four postgraduate sub-levels at level 8, among other innovations. Level 6 is opened up for diplomas and certificates. Both documents adopt a “nested” approach to qualification design, with general qualification types being specified and registered before the specific qualification types that are nested in them, allowing scope for providers to write the learning outcomes for a particular designated variant of a registered qualification.⁽²⁵⁾

Chapter 2

Conceptual and architectural design

Concepts

South Africa's NQF has two main formative concepts: integration and learning outcomes. Both are briefly mentioned in the SAQA Act, 1995. Creating "an integrated national framework for learning achievements" is the first objective of the NQF, and a standard is defined as a registered statement of "desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria".⁽²⁶⁾

The NQF has been integrated from the outset, in the sense that it incorporates all education and training. Having all sectors of learning within one Framework, subject to the same overall scheme of recognition, reflects the government's policy that each sector relates to others and must be equally valued. SAQA, citing the first White Paper on Education and Training, links this idea to the need in modern economies and societies to take a flexible, holistic and non-hierarchical view of learning and work, and to promote lifelong learning for both personal and social advantage.

"If one accepts that there is more than one dimension to knowledge and hence that learning continues both before and after a qualification has been awarded in a variety of sites of learning, then in order to achieve integration and coherence within the system so that access and portability [of learning credits] can become a reality, it is necessary to clearly articulate the outcomes of learning achievements."

By building an appropriate set of "Critical Outcomes" into each standard or qualification, SAQA intends to ensure that all learning programmes will enable learners to develop the capacity for lifelong learning.

Placing a value on each learner's achievements – learning outcomes – rather than the learning site or institution is intended to subvert the hierarchies installed by the apartheid order in South Africa, encourage the recognition of prior learning however and wherever obtained, and facilitate comparison between South African and international qualifications.⁽²⁷⁾

In describing what a qualification is or means, SAQA has adopted a particular terminology that is intended to meet the requirements of all education and training at all levels of the NQF. A registered national qualification is intended to represent a planned, purposeful combination of learning outcomes that provides learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning, where applied competence refers to the ability to put acquired learning outcomes into practice. The New Academic Policy task team proposes to add a third attribute, "autonomy of learning", which means learners' capacity to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

A qualification may be registered whole or as a specified combination of unit standards, which must themselves be registered. Both formats must specify learning outcomes and an integration of both formative and summative assessment, and both must indicate that credit may be gained by RPL. This position represents the outcome of intense and protracted debate during the development phase between proponents of an initial proposal for an all-unit standard qualification design and opponents, especially in the higher education community, who insisted that all learning achievement could not be properly assessed in this way.⁽²⁸⁾

All of these concepts – integration, learning outcomes, applied competence, unit standards, RPL – are part of the law of the NQF and represent considered positions adopted by the Authority and agreed by the Ministers after wide public consultation. Their adoption and application by SAQA has been and continues to be subjected to intense scrutiny, criticism and debate within the academic community, the labour movement, among adult educators, teacher educators and trainers, both within SAQA's structures and consultative forums and outside. SAQA welcomes the intellectual scrutiny, which it regards as imperative for the health and public acceptability of the NQF. In SAQA's view its formulations accommodate the main criticisms, allow for flexible application and lend themselves to critical and creative learning. Moreover, SAQA points out that key national stakeholder bodies must approve all national standards and qualifications before they can be registered on the Framework, and all are subject to review every three years.⁽²⁹⁾

Architecture

The SAQA Act envisages two sorts of sub-structures: “bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications” and “bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of such standards or qualifications”. After investigating and consulting on alternatives SAQA decided that the former group would comprise National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), and the latter would comprise Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) and moderating bodies.⁽³⁰⁾

The Act provides that standards setting bodies (NSBs and SGBs) must be registered by SAQA, whereas quality assurance bodies (ETQAs) must be accredited by SAQA. The distinction is not explained in the Act. In the development of the NQF, an absolute distinction of function has not been maintained. SAQA regards all its sub-structures as contributing to the NQF “quality spiral”. By regulation NSBs are clearly responsible for quality assuring standards and qualifications generated by SGBs, although the term “quality assure” is not used for what they do. By regulation also, ETQAs (and moderating bodies) are required to recommend new or modified standards or qualifications to NSBs. SAQA has even authorised ETQAs to “participate in, initiate and even take the lead in establishing” SGBs. But ETQAs may not be SGBs. Though the reasons are not set out clearly, SAQA regards the separation of quality assurance from standards setting as a matter of principle – “maintaining the integrity of the quality system”. A second matter of principle is that quality assurance bodies may not be providers of education and training, on the grounds that a referee may not be a player in the same game.⁽³¹⁾

Standards setting and qualifications registration

National Standards Bodies

The 12 NSBs, one for each of the NQF’s organising fields, have a distinct status as “an integral part of the Authority”. Each reports to SAQA on the standards setting activities in its respective field. Each is registered by SAQA for a three-year period, and provided its performance is satisfactory it may be re-registered on application to SAQA. The first NSBs were registered in mid-1999. All twelve NSBs were re-registered in October 2001 for three years.⁽³²⁾

NSBs have a pivotal role in relation to SAQA’s prime responsibility for overseeing the generation of quality standards and qualifications for the NQF. Their principal task is to ensure suitable standards and qualifications of high quality are generated for their learning fields and recommended to SAQA for registration. An NSB has significant powers within its field, subject to SAQA’s ultimate authority. It defines the boundaries of the field and delineates sub-fields according to specific criteria, and having done so it is empowered to recognise or establish and exercise quality control over SGBs within its sub-fields. Its work, and the work of the SGBs in its field, must proceed according to a comprehensive business plan. In consultation with NSBs, SAQA has prepared several guidance documents to facilitate these processes and maintain coherence across NSBs and SGBs.⁽³³⁾

The membership of NSBs embodies the stakeholder principle, on the grounds that “knowledge creation is no longer the preserve of narrowly-defined groups of ‘experts’”. In keeping with the design of the NQF, which requires that its governance should be based on the active involvement of as wide a section of the community as possible, each NSB must comprise a maximum of six representatives from six categories of organisation:

- state representatives (including DoE, DoL, and where desirable other state departments, provinces and schools)
- organised business
- organised labour
- providers of education and training to represent the GET, FET and HET bands
- critical interest groups
- community/learner organisations.

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Nominations for NSB membership must be gazetted for public comment in order to ensure that persons appointed by SAQA to an NSB command the confidence of its main national stakeholder bodies. The criteria for nomination are rigorous. Nominating bodies must be sensitive to the need for equity and redress. They are expected to nominate persons who “enjoy credibility in the various parts of the constituency in question” and are committed to two-way communication between the NSB and the constituency. Nominees must also be competent in the NSB’s field, able to mediate among the needs and interests of all relevant levels of the NQF, exercise critical judgement, and “consider issues of productivity, fairness, public interest and international comparability as related to education and training”. If SAQA is not satisfied that such criteria have been met, it may appoint additional members of an NSB to bring it up to speed. Each NSB is meant to have a maximum of 36 members, but may have more if SAQA approves. Each NSB elects its own chairperson, either from among its members or from outside.⁽³⁴⁾

Effective stakeholder participation in NSB work has had to be actively encouraged and managed by NSB chairpersons and SAQA staff. During the first NSB cycle there was persistent disquiet about the number of appointed members who failed to become active, or became “serial apologisers” for non-attendance at meetings. The initial period was characterised by considerable uncertainty and confusion, since NSBs were required to help design the system and rules by which they were expected to operate. Nevertheless SAQA takes pride in the extent to which citizens nominated by their constituencies have voluntarily contributed their time and skills as NSB members, persevering through the difficult developmental phase and ensuring that SGBs have been recognised or established and new standards generated. Equity criteria were particularly emphasised in the second round of nominations, especially with a view to achieving a higher representation of women in leadership positions. Six of the newly elected chairpersons are women, six men.⁽³⁵⁾

The stakeholder principle is taken further by a requirement that each NSB must establish a “Reference Grouping” of organisations that are “affected by the activities” of the NSB and are not themselves members of the NSB. (Although not specified as such in the regulations, SAQA has described reference groups as comprising “organisations representing the disabled and marginalised sectors of the community”.) Such bodies are entitled to apply to the NSB for reference group status and to make submissions on proposed standards and qualifications. No standard may be registered unless listed bodies have been consulted by mail. Registration may be withheld at the request of a listed body if its submission has not been formally considered and replied to.⁽³⁶⁾

NSBs must observe two additional safeguards before recommending a standard or qualification. They must subject their proposal to expert scrutiny, and publish the draft for public comment.⁽³⁷⁾

Standards Generating Bodies

NSBs may either recognise existing bodies as SGBs or establish new ones. A body applying for recognition as an SGB must designate a group within it that meets the SGB criteria. SGBs may have national or sectoral coverage, or they may be specific to a single provider. A sub-field may have more than one SGB provided that the NSB is satisfied that appropriate needs are being met without unnecessary duplication. Nevertheless, assessing need in the absence of clear level descriptor and qualification policies has not been straightforward.

SGBs must comprise up to 25 (or more if SAQA approves) representatives of “key education and training stakeholder interest groups” and specialists in the sub-field concerned, nominated by invitation with due regard for the same attributes required for members of NSBs and for “representativeness and equity, redress and relevant expertise”. An NSB may appoint the members of an SGB only after satisfying itself by public advertisement that the membership will be acceptable to and representative of the sub-field.⁽³⁸⁾

SGBs, like NSBs, are required by regulation to publish their draft standards and qualifications for comment, consult experts, and refer their work to bodies listed as members of the Reference Grouping for their sub-field.

The apparent duplication in NSB and SGB procedures has been addressed by a “fast tracking mechanism” adopted by SAQA for the registration of standards and qualifications. This includes the identification of an NSB “link-person” to work with each SGB and the provision of some financial and technical support. The SAQA Directorate: Standard Setting and Development operates a four month turn-around service standard for the period from the delivery of a draft standard until registration, inclusive of a wide consultation process and a period of 30 days for public comment.⁽³⁹⁾

By February 2002, SAQA had registered 106 SGBs and others were in process of formation.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Interim standards and new standards and qualifications

In 1998 SAQA embarked on the massive task of recording all existing qualifications as a prelude to having them re-cast in outcomes-based format, evaluated, revised and granted interim registration. The NSBs shouldered the major part of this burden supported by SAQA staff. All universities, technikons, technical colleges, industry training boards, and large numbers of private providers and NGOs participated. 8 858 qualifications were recorded, and by 30 June 2000 6 808 revised and re-formatted qualifications had been granted interim registration on the Register of Existing Qualifications and were available for posting on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). Interim registration has been granted for three years. On 30 June 2003 interim registration will lapse and by that date new qualifications that fully comply with SAQA's specifications must have been registered.

A similar exercise was undertaken with providers of short courses. In recognition of the contribution of high quality short courses to personal and professional development and workplace efficiency, SAQA canvassed providers to submit provider and short course data in standard format. SAQA captured data on 228 providers and 3 053 short courses.

SAQA considers that both exercises, though exceptionally complex and unwelcome to many providers, has significantly broadened understanding and experience of the outcomes-based approach. The Authority believes that it has brought the major part of the provider community within the ambit of the NQF, provided the basis for the implementation of quality assurance, and will greatly assist the development of new standards and qualifications.⁽⁴¹⁾

In co-operation with NSBs and SGBs, SAQA's fast-tracking procedures have accelerated the generation of standards required for the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy, in particular the development of learnerships. Between December 2001 and February 2002 an additional 46 new qualifications and 743 new standards were registered on the NQF, bringing the totals to 183 new qualifications and 3 165 new standards. Nevertheless, progress across NSBs is very uneven.⁽⁴²⁾

Two major, innovative qualifications development processes have been launched within the HET and GET sectors respectively.

- In Higher Education, bearing in mind the June 2003 deadline for the replacement of interim registered qualifications, SAUVCA in partnership with the CTP targeted the 20 per cent of qualifications for which 80 per cent of university students enrol. In the first phase of their Generic Qualifications Standard Setting Project (GOSS-P) they registered five SGBs for the production of five generic Bachelor level degree qualifications. In the process they devised the concept of “nested qualifications” which has been adopted in both the CHE's draft New Academic Policy and SAQA's draft Level Descriptors document.⁽⁴³⁾
- In General Education and Training, following a review of the Curriculum 2005 programme, the Minister of Education appointed a team to prepare a “Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools)”. DoE did not apply to SAQA for the team's recognition as an SGB. However, the team has worked closely with SAQA, taken account of SAQA's draft policy document for the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC), and observed the requirements for NQF registration of the GETC for Compulsory Schooling. The GETC for Compulsory Schooling will be registered as a whole qualification, with specified exit-level Grade 9 Learning Outcomes and their associated Assessment Standards.⁽⁴⁴⁾

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Quality assurance

Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies

ETQAs must quality assure education and training provision across the range of standards and qualifications for which they are accredited. They must do so by monitoring provision, promoting quality among providers and accrediting providers to offer specified national standards and qualifications. This entails evaluating and moderating providers' assessment of learning outcomes to ensure fairness, validity and reliability, and registering assessors for specified standards and qualifications. ETQAs must also recommend new or modified standards or qualifications to NSBs, and they must certify learners whose standards and qualifications they are responsible for quality assuring.

Accredited ETQAs are responsible for monitoring and auditing learner achievements in terms of specified nationally registered standards and qualifications. SAQA has applied a different organisational principle for ETQAs than for NSBs. Instead of being organised by field, ETQAs are to be recognised in one of three sectors:

- a social sector;
- an economic sector; or
- an education and training sub-system sector.

The language of the regulations implies that SAQA must accredit ETQAs in each sector, but if there is a gap, and if it is deemed necessary, SAQA itself is empowered to act as a sector ETQA.⁽⁴⁵⁾

SAQA envisages that

- a variety of *social sector ETQAs* could be accredited for relevant standards and qualifications that are not catered for by other ETQAs;
- diverse *economic sector ETQAs* could be accredited, comprising
 - 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) each for its own designated economic sector, and
 - statutory and voluntary professional bodies and institutes, for their own professions linked to economic sectors; and
- two *education and training sub-system sector ETQAs* could be accredited, comprising
 - the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education for the HET band, and
 - the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Council for the GET and FET bands.⁽⁴⁶⁾

In order to be accredited by SAQA an ETQA must be able to demonstrate that

- there is a need in its sector;
- it has a "primary focus" within its sector;
- it will not duplicate the work of another ETQA, except with SAQA's approval;
- it has the capacity and resources;
- it has a quality management system;
- it is separate from and independent of the provision of education and training; and
- national stakeholders are represented at decision-making level to "ensure public accountability and transparency".⁽⁴⁷⁾

These criteria are meant to be applied so as to achieve "maximum coherence and minimum duplication", but SAQA acknowledges that partial duplication of ETQA functions is inevitable, given the overlap of legislative and other provisions relating to the responsibilities of band ETQAs and economic sector ETQAs. The ETQA Regulations provide that an ETQA may delegate some of its functions, but SAQA has favoured a partnership model to manage tensions among ETQAs operating in the same band.

SAQA's position is that tensions among ETQAs are an understandable and to some extent necessary consequence of three circumstances: ETQAs wield considerable authority with respect to providers, they represent a range of traditions of doing quality assurance, and they vary considerably in age and experience. SAQA believes that all these attributes must be brought together if a workable system is to be built. The Authority has brokered the negotiation of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between ETQAs, especially in the higher education band, in an attempt to forge working co-operation and enable the pooling of resources in the common task of quality assurance.⁽⁴⁸⁾

A substantial innovation has been introduced by the GENFETQA Act, 2001 which provides that the GENFETQA Council "must be regarded as having been accredited" by SAQA as the band ETQA for GET and FET. The Council must meet the criteria for accreditation and perform its functions as the band ETQA subject to the SAQA Act, 1995, but by implication it is exempt from applying for accreditation from SAQA and may not have its accreditation withdrawn by SAQA. The Minister of Education explained to Parliament that the Council's scope

"will be limited to programmes offered by institutions established, declared or registered under the South African Schools Act, the Further Education and Training Act, or the Adult Basic Education and Training Act, and it will not affect other quality assurance bodies or processes in regard to programmes offered outside of these institutions.... The Sector Education and Training Authorities (the SETAs) will therefore continue to play a quality assurance role in respect of programmes offered by employers and training agencies within their economic sector, and the South African Qualifications Authority will maintain an oversight of quality assurance structures and processes across all bands of the NQF".

The Higher Education Amendment Act, 2001 (Act No. 23 of 2001) likewise provides that the HEQC "is deemed to be accredited by SAQA" as an ETQA primary responsible for higher education.⁽⁴⁹⁾

It is clear that Parliament has placed both band ETQAs on a different footing from other ETQAs in respect of their accreditation with SAQA, though both must meet the requirements for accreditation and they remain subject to the SAQA Act, 1995 in all other respects.

By comparison, the Skills Development Act, 1998 provides that each new SETA must apply to SAQA for accreditation as an ETQA within one week after its establishment and "must, within 18 months from the date of that application, be so accredited". Since SAQA is the sole accrediting authority this appears to place SAQA under a statutory obligation to accredit the SETA ETQAs within 18 months. The provision was intended to set a target for SETAs and ensure they took ETQA status seriously. DoL mounted an EU-sponsored development project with SAQA's assistance to prepare the SETAs for accreditation. All have since been accredited, but not necessarily within the 18-month deadline.⁽⁵⁰⁾

By February 2002, 31 ETQAs had been accredited by SAQA and three were being evaluated, as follows:

- Social sector ETQAs: accredited 0, under evaluation 1
- Economic sector ETQAs
 - SETAs: accredited 25
 - professional bodies (statutory): accredited 2, under evaluation 1
 - professional bodies (non-statutory): accredited 3, under evaluation 1
- Education and training sub-system sector ETQAs: accredited 1. (This is the CHE/HEQC. The GENFETQA Council had not yet been appointed.)

SAQA reports that a number of other organisations including statutory and non-statutory professional bodies have applied for ETQA status and their applications are being processed.⁽⁵¹⁾

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Moderating bodies

SAQA may appoint a moderating body for a fixed period to undertake moderation of assessment decisions by ETQAs and make appropriate recommendations to SAQA. Moderating bodies must have the capability to moderate “in a manner that ensures that assessment...is fair, valid and reliable”, and must have appropriate national stakeholder representation at decision-making level. No moderating bodies have yet been appointed.⁽⁵²⁾

National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)

The NLRD is regarded by SAQA as the third major “deliverable” of the NQF, after standards setting and quality assurance. When fully operational it will function as the management information system of the NQF, able to provide information to all NQF structures and policy makers to assist decision-making, and to all learners and employers with proof of qualifications obtained. It will therefore take its place as one of the nation's key resources in the education and training and labour market fields. Ultimately the database will house details of

- all nationally registered qualifications and unit standards;
- all bodies involved in creating, administering, registering, quality assuring and providing qualifications and unit standards (NSBs, SGBs, ETQAs, assessors and providers); and
- all learners who have achieved qualifications and unit standards.

The loading of learner records is in progress, with information coming or expected from the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT), the Department of Education, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and SETAs. Once all records have been received the total number of learner records is expected to exceed 40 million. Monthly Information Technology Advisory Committee meetings are held to keep the NLRD fully in touch with its stakeholders.

The main access will be via searchable data files of all public domain NLRD information on the SAQA website. Relevant computer-based training will be provided to all NLRD users, internally and externally.⁽⁵³⁾

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised a complex record of prodigious activity undertaken by many thousands of South Africans in hundreds of institutions, statutory bodies organisations and workplaces across the country. The focal point and co-ordinator has been the South African Qualifications Authority, the body established by Parliament to oversee the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework.

The NQF has been in development as the germ of an idea for the best part of two decades. As a formal policy of the democratic government it is eight years old. In law it has existed for seven years. SAQA became operational five years ago. The Minister formally established the NQF less than four years ago, in the NSB Regulations. Depending on which end of the telescope one is looking through, the NQF has been implemented at a snail's pace, or with breathless speed.

In mid-1999 the SAQA Executive Officer reported to the Ministry of Education, “The NQF is established in legislation, discourse and practice, and is part of the South African psyche as witnessed by the groundswell of NQF activities.”⁽⁵⁴⁾

The quality of implementation must be measured by the extent to which and the manner in which the objectives of the NQF are being achieved. It would be premature at this stage of the report for the Study Team to venture an assessment.

We turn now to record the views of all the bodies that gave us the benefit of their own analysis of the problems of NQF implementation.

Endnotes

- (1) National Training Board/Human Sciences Research Council, *Investigation into a National Training Strategy for the RSA* (Pretoria, March 1991); Department of National Education, *The Education Renewal Strategy: A Discussion Document* (Pretoria, June 1991); ANC, *Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1992); NECC, *The National Education Policy Investigation: The Framework Report and Final Report Summaries* (Johannesburg: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 21; NECC, *Education Planning, Systems, and Structure: Report of the NEPI Education Planning, Systems, and Structure Research Group* (Johannesburg: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 100.
- (2) National Training Board, *A Discussion Document on a National Training Strategy Initiative: A Preliminary Report* (Pretoria, 1994); NTB Task Team: National Training Strategy Initiative, Committee 2, "A Proposal for an Integrated National Approach to Education and Training," [Pretoria, n.d.]. See also Zelda Groener, "Political roots of the debate about the integration of education and training," in Wally Morrow and Kenneth King, *Vision and Reality: Changing Education and Training in South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), pp. 86-95.
- (3) African National Congress, *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* (Johannesburg, January 1994); Centre for Education Policy Development, *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* (Johannesburg, May 1994); African National Congress, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme: A Policy Framework* (Johannesburg, 1994), p. 62.
- (4) Ministry in the Office of the President, *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development*, Notice No. 1954 of 1994, *Government Gazette*, 23 November 1994; Ministry of Education, *White Paper on Education and Training. Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Steps to Develop a New System*, Notice No. 196 of 1995, *Government Gazette*, 15 March 1995.
- (5) Brief accounts of the origins of the South African NQF are given in "The Emergence of the NQF and SAQA," *SAQA Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May/June 1997), Melanie Samson and Salim Vally, "Snakes and Ladders: The Promise and Potential Pitfalls of the NQF," in *The National Qualification Framework: Critical Reflections* ([Johannesburg:] Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, July 1997), pp. 8-10, and SAQA, *The National Qualifications Framework: An Overview* (Pretoria, [n.d.]), pp. 4-5. A longer account will be available in Adrienne Bird, *National Monograph on Technical and Vocational Training in South Africa* (Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning, forthcoming).
- (6) SAQA, *The South African Qualifications Authority* [leaflet], [Pretoria, n.d.].
- (7) SAQA, *NQF Overview*, p. 3.
- (8) <http://www.saqqa.org.za/html/nqf/nqfcover.htm>.
- (9) See South African Bureau of Standards (SABS), at <http://www.sabs.co.za/1.html> and South African National Accreditation System (SANAS), at <http://www.sanas.co.za/Mission.html>.
- (10) ANC, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*, p. 61.
- (11) David Adler, Acting Chairperson, "Chairperson's Foreword," SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament 1998/99*, p. 3. For summaries, see Department of Education, *Education in South Africa: Achievements since 1994* (Pretoria, 2001); Department of Labour, *Skills for Productive Citizenship for all: The National Skills Development Strategy April 2001-March 2005 (Vhutsila)* (Pretoria, 2001); also [Department of Education/Department of Labour], *A Nation at Work for a Better Life for All: Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa*, [Pretoria, 2001].
- (12) An analysis of legislation relating to the NQF is at Appendix D.
- (13) Department of Education, *Implementation Plan for Tirisano 2001-2002* (Pretoria, [n.d.]); Department of Labour, *Skills for Productive Citizenship for All*.
- (14) *HRD Strategy for South Africa*, pp. 5-10.
- (15) *White Paper on Education and Training*, pp. 15, 26; SAQA, *The National Qualifications Framework: An Overview*. SAQA's statement that the NQF is "the key national policy with respect to the transformation of the education and training system in South Africa" goes further than the White Paper, but indicates the value the Authority places on its responsibilities. SAQA, "Budget 2002/2003 and Business Plan for the Period April 2002 to March 2007," [Pretoria, 2001], p. 1.
- (16) Superseded by the National Skills Authority (NSA) in terms of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998), section 4.
- (17) SAQA Act, 1995, sections 4, 12.
- (18) Samuel B A Isaacs has occupied successive positions of leadership in the development of the NQF for the past eight years. He participated in the NTSI, convened the NQF task team for the *Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET)* (Johannesburg: Centre for Education Policy Development, 1995), was a member of the team that wrote *Ways of Seeing the National Qualifications Framework* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1995), convened the Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF that prepared the report *Lifelong Learning through a National Qualifications Framework: Discussion Document* (Pretoria: [Department of Education], February 1996), and was appointed as the first Chairperson of SAQA before becoming Executive Officer on 1 March 1997.
- (19) SAQA, "Budget 2002/2003 and Business Plan: April 2002 to March 2007" [Pretoria, 2001], pp. 33-36.
- (20) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001* [Pretoria, 2001], pp. 22-23, at <http://www.saqqa.org.za/html/publications/reports/rep00-01.html>; Institute of Directors, *The King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa*, at <http://www.iodsa.co.za/loD%20Draft%20King%20Report.pdf>.
- (21) SAQA Act, 1995, section 10.
- (22) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, pp. 13, 15.
- (23) SAQA, *Annual Reports* for 1998/99, 1999/2000, 2000/2001.
- (24) NSB Regulations, *Government Gazette*, Regulation Gazette No. 6140, 28 March 1998, regs. 2-4.
- (25) Michael Cosser, "Toward the Development of Level Descriptors," *SAQA Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (August 1998), pp. 19-25; SAQA *Bulletin*, Vol 4, No. 1 (May 2000); SAQA, *The Development of Level Descriptors for the NQF: Document for Public Comment*, *Government Gazette*, No. 22869 (3 December 2001); CHE, *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education: Discussion Document* ([Pretoria], December 2001). See also Note 43.

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- (26) See also Samuel Isaacs, "Making the NQF road by walking reflectively, accountably and boldly," in Yusuf Sayed and Jonathan Jansen (eds.), *Implementing Education Policies: The South African Experience* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001), p. 128.
- (27) NSB Regulations, reg. 7(2), (3); SAQA, *The National Qualifications Framework: An Overview* (Pretoria, [n.d.]), pp. 7-8. Also *White Paper on Education and Training*, p.15.
- (28) NSB Regulations, regs. 1, 8; CHE, *A New Academic Policy...Discussion Document*, p. 58; SAUVCA submission to the Study Team, 9 October 2001, p. 3.
- (29) SAQA, *NQF Overview*, pp. 9-10. Examples of important contributions to the debates may be found in CEPD, *Reconstruction, Development and the National Qualifications Framework*; Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, *The National Qualification Framework: Critical Reflections*; Peter Kallaway, Glenda Kruss, Aslam Fataar and Gari Donn (eds.), *Education after Apartheid: South African Education in Transition* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1997); *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1999), and Mda, T and M Mothatha (eds.), *Critical Issues in South African Education* (Cape Town: Juta, 2000).
- (30) SAQA Act, 1995, section 5.
- (31) SAQA Act, section 5(1); NSB Regulations, reg. 19(1)(d); ETQA Regulations, regs. 9((1)(g), (h), 20; SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* (Pretoria, November 1999, pp. 5-6, 9, 25. Notwithstanding the separation principle the ETQA Regulations (reg. 22) permit "professional bodies and examining bodies" to apply for recognition as or membership of an SGB, for accreditation as an ETQA, and for appointment as a moderating body.
- (32) NSB Regulations, reg. 12; "Standards Setting Taking Off," *SAQA Update*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (November 2001).
- (33) NSB Regulations, regs. 19, 20(2); SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament, April 1999-March 2000*, p. 7.
- (34) SAQA, *NQF Overview*, p. 12; NSB Regulations, regs. 15, 16; Annexure, "Rules of Procedure for National Standards Bodies," rule 3.
- (35) SAQA, *Annual Report, April 2000-March 2001*; SAQA Inter-NSB Forum Meetings, "Summary of Actions and Recommendations," 25 July 2000, 15-16 May 2001, at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nsb/inter-nsb/decision-list.html>.
- (36) NSB Regulations, regs. 17, 19(2)(d); SAQA, *NQF Overview*, p. 17.
- (37) NSB Regulations, reg. 19(2)(b), (c).
- (38) NSB Regulations, regs. 22, 23; SAQA, *NSB Manual* (Pretoria, 1999), p. 14., at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nqf/nsb/nsbmanual.pdf>.
- (39) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, pp. 5-6.
- (40) Number of registered SGBs kindly provided by Joe Samuels, Director: Standard Setting and Development, SAQA, 26 February 2002.
- (41) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*; SAQA presentation to the Study Team, July 2001.
- (42) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*; SAQA, "Overall Qualifications and Standards Status Report: 9 November 2001," at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nsb/qualstdsrep.pdf>. February 2002 figures kindly provided by Joe Samuels, Director: Standard Setting and Development, SAQA, 26 February 2002.
- (43) The concept of nested qualifications "means that in setting standards for qualifications 'the system moves logically from the most general to the most specific layers. With level descriptors and standards for the most general qualification types being in place first, these will guide standards setting for the more specific qualification types, which are nested within the more general and meet their requirements'." SAUVCA submission to the Study Team, October 2001, pp 15-16. The example is given of progression from Bachelor to Bachelor of Science, to Bachelor of Science in Geology. CHE, *New Academic Policy*, p. 45.
- (44) Department of Education, *Draft Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools): Qualifications Framework for the GETC for Compulsory Schooling* (Pretoria, 30 July 2001); SAQA, *Draft General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) Policy Document* ([Pretoria], October 2001), at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/publications/pol-docs/getc.html>.
- (45) ETQA Regulations, regs. 2, 9.
- (46) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*, pp. 11-12; Skills Development Act, 1998, section 10; Higher Education Act, 1997, section 7; General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, 2001, sections 4-5.
- (47) ETQA Regulations, reg. 3.
- (48) SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament, April 1999-March 2000*, p. 9; ETQA Regulations, reg. 9; S B A Isaacs, "Issues of Quality in Standard Setting and Quality Assurance," *SAQA Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 2000), p. 3.
- (49) GENFETQA Act, 2001, section 5; Speech by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, MP in the debate on the GENFETQA Bill, National Council of Provinces, Cape Town, 15 November 2001, at http://education.pwv.gov.za/Media/Speeches_2001/Nov01/genfetqa.htm; Higher Education Amendment Act, 2001 (Act No. 23 of 2001), section 1.
- (50) Skills Development Act, 1998, section 10(1)(e); SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, p. 6.
- (51) SAQA, "ETQA Accreditation Status Report February-March 2002," at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nqf/etqa/docs/status.htm>.
- (52) ETQA Regulations, regs. 18-20.
- (53) SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, pp. 7-8, 11; SAQA presentation to the Study Team, July 2001.
- (54) SAQA, "SAQA's Objectives and Deliverables for the Next Five Years," [Memorandum] for the attention of the Ministry of Education by S B A Isaacs, Executive Officer, 23 July 1999.

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS TO THE STUDY TEAM

Introduction

The Study Team received written submissions and met with representatives of many bodies and organisations that have played exceptionally important roles in the conceptualisation and development of the National Qualifications Framework. Lists of the written submissions received and bodies consulted are at Appendices E and F.

In this chapter the views we received are summarised on the basis of the following common themes:

- conception and architecture of the NQF;
- governance: articulation of legislation, policies and regulations;
- integration of education and training;
- the standards setting system; and
- the quality assurance system.

We provide a faithful summary of the advice presented to us, retaining the flavour and often the actual wording of what was said and written, without interjecting commentary by the team itself. We have not linked the names of respondents with particular comments, except in the case of the Departments of Education and Labour.

The Study Team had asked respondents to address themselves to the terms of reference (see Appendix B). Since these were designed to raise questions about the pace and effectiveness of NQF implementation, the respondents tended to focus on what they considered to be going wrong. The tenor of their comments was critical, and some views were expressed strongly. Many respondents considered the NQF to be at a crossroads. According to this view, the support and goodwill of important constituencies is at risk. Unless substantial changes are made to the architecture and processes of the NQF the damage to the concept itself may be irreparable.

It is striking that, in almost every case, committed supporters of the NQF objectives delivered the criticism, with a view to overcoming the difficulties they described. The overwhelming majority of respondents have invested years of effort in the NQF project. In other words, these are criticisms largely from the inside.

The Study Team distinguishes between four categories of respondents: departments of state, SAQA sub-structures, stakeholders and providers. The summary that follows covers the views of the last three categories, taking them together for purposes of the summary, and making distinctions where necessary to indicate different perspectives. In order to ensure that the views of these respondents are presented and considered in their own right, we summarise them first. The respective positions of the Departments of Education and Labour will conclude the chapter.

The conceptual framework and architecture of the NQF

Complex architecture

The architecture is said to be excessive, overly complex, time consuming and therefore unsustainable. This is partly a result of the proliferation of SAQA's procedures and sub-structures (especially Standards Generating Bodies and Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies). The problems of limited institutional, financial and human resource capacity in the country compound the situation. SAQA sub-structures are viewed as excessive in respect both of the number of bodies and size of membership. Procedures are said to be rapidly approaching a point of over-regulation. Constant change in procedures, policies and guidelines is experienced as unmanageable, even by SAQA. The result is confusion, frustration and erosion of trust. Moreover, the language of the NQF is regarded as complex and confusing even to insiders and baffling and alienating to those who are new to NQF processes.

Chapter 3

Slow implementation of NQF objectives

Many submissions argue strongly that the practical implementation of the NQF has been very slow and delays the realisation of its objectives. Respondents believe that far more time and effort has been spent on creating the architecture of the NQF (including structure, policies, regulations and procedures) than on the generation and registration of standards. They call for fundamental changes to ensure the acceleration of NQF implementation.

- The priority of the NQF should be to make qualifications available to learners as quickly - and in as many fields - as possible so they can take advantage of new learning opportunities to change their lives
- The poor rate of implementation of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) evokes serious disappointment. This is especially because RPL played an important role in selling the NQF concept to workers, and because of its potential to redress historic inequalities and ensure wider access to education and training for those who were excluded in the past.
- Relatively few new standards have been registered thus far. The NQF is populated mainly by old qualifications that have been reformatted and given interim registration. Many view the interim qualifications as a paper exercise and not a genuine engagement with transformation issues.

Conversely, it is said that too little attention has been given to other key aspects of a national qualifications framework, including:

- helping providers and learners change attitudes towards learning;
- making human and other resources available for implementation;
- developing appropriate curricula and materials;
- improving the capacity of providers;
- putting in place registered assessors;
- creating new learning opportunities and informing learners about them;
- ensuring quality learning and teaching;
- training educators; and
- recording learner achievements.

Critics attack the slow pace of transformation in the education and training system at large, which the NQF was expected to accelerate. The NQF is not only about setting standards and registering qualifications, and SAQA alone cannot be held responsible for all other aspects of change. Many other agencies, including national and provincial departments have a crucial role to play.

Integration of education and training

There is general concern that the integration of education and training has not been achieved. Many problems have arisen because of the absence of a conceptual framework that integrates the two. Broadly, the submissions note:

- the inability of the current framework to align education and training;
- the contradictions in policies emanating from the split responsibility in government for education and training; and
- the difficulty of including the academic stream of formal education in the current framework. Reference is frequently made to the issue of unit standards-based qualifications versus whole qualifications.

Higher Education and the NQF

Some of the most passionate presentations were made on behalf of the Higher Education sector. Respondents express complete support for the objectives of the NQF but grave disquiet about its implementation.

The submissions note that in other countries HE is usually treated differently from other parts of the national qualifications framework. In South Africa there has been a reluctance to appreciate the complexities of Higher Education and the multiple challenges and pressures experienced by the sector as it transforms in terms of the White Paper on Higher Education (1997), the Higher Education Act (1997), the *National Plan for Higher Education*

(2001) and the (then) forthcoming report on restructuring the system. HE has not been given the space and flexibility to engage with the NQF in ways that take these into account. A rigid “one size fits all” approach to NQF development has tended to prevail. SAQA’s perceived inflexibility is the main reason for the reluctance of the sector to engage with the Authority and participate in the implementation of the NQF in a fully constructive manner.⁽¹⁾

Although whole qualifications are incorporated in the NQF design, the NQF is said to be characterised by a unit standards-based approach. HE is premised on the conviction, based on academic experience, that “knowledge outcomes in a whole qualification must be integrated and connected rather than being a collection of units, bits of knowledge that are largely skills driven”. However, SAQA’s structures are considered to bear the imprint of the unit standard methodology. Thus some submissions strongly argue that the NQF was not designed to accommodate Higher Education, and its place in the NQF has been given on a rule of inclusivity rather than through clear systems planning to effect a truly integrated framework for education and training. The co-existence of unit standards and whole qualifications in a single framework needs to be carefully assessed in relation to the value and necessity of each type. Great anxiety is expressed at the vigorous marketing by SETAs of unit standards-based qualifications in higher education institutions. Institutions are vulnerable because most of them are cash-strapped whereas the SETAs are cash-rich.

Respondents argue that the bureaucratisation of the NQF prevents the majority of academics (and many others) from critical engagement with such substantive conceptual and policy issues. Instead, the complexity of the system and the demands of time and cost have fostered a culture of technical compliance, witnessed especially in the re-formatting of existing qualifications for interim registration by SAQA.

Technical colleges and the NQF

Technical colleges fully support the NQF, which they see as a solution to many problems their students face in the current system. Currently many technical college students have to repeat courses at the same level if they want to progress to higher education. The introduction of a new structure of assessment and certification in line with the NQF will free them from the constraints of the old National Certificate. However, the absence of a new curriculum framework for FET and the *ad hoc* manner in which the old system is being transformed are serious obstacles.

Governance

Co-ordination

Respondents complain of lack of coordination in the policy implementation process and “too many cooks in the kitchen”. There is an urgent need to clarify areas and lines of responsibility to avoid duplication, fragmentation, territorial battles, a waste of resources and confusion. They suggest that SAQA, the DoE and the DoL must meet and clarify the roles and responsibilities (including policy and legislative responsibilities) of the various players in the NQF field. This will ensure better coordination, a more coherent approach to implementation and a more efficient utilisation of resources.

Contradictory policy and legislation, and overlapping powers

Respondents are annoyed by the actual or apparent contradictions in policy and legislation governing the NQF and the confusion and rivalry this has created. HE respondents refer to a policy dichotomy, commenting that “in some ways the HE system has resembled an orchestra responding to (at least) two separate conductors”. They note that virtually no attention is given to the NQF in the Ministry of Education’s *National Plan for Higher Education* and that the new HEMIS subsidy system is in opposition to the principle of portability of qualifications. National policies must “speak to each other”. Clear lines of authority and responsibility must be demarcated.

Contestations about “primacy” and “deeming” among the DoE, CHE, SAQA and DoL, SETAs, professional bodies, and institutional providers attracted harsh comment. The submissions argue that opaque lines of responsibility and what appear to some to be power plays do not make for a stable system. The decision-making chains in addition to being unclear are too long and complex to enable the NQF to be a responsive system.

Chapter 3

Respondents urge that SAQA, DoE and DoL need to clarify their roles and the relationships of the various structures, and bring coherence into the system. They consider that the current arrangements for memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between various ETQAs operating in the same band are ineffective and unmanageable. There is a pressing need for a long-term strategy.

SAQA funding

The submissions express disappointment that SAQA is not given sufficient financial and political support by the government to advance NQF implementation, and as a result is unable to carry out its functions as effectively as the importance of the NQF demands. The poor funding from the fiscus and the perceived poor support and leadership of the NQF from the Departments of Education and Labour are viewed as an indication that the government gives low priority to the NQF in the broader scheme of things. The DoE is regarded as having prime responsibility for leadership but is not considered to be exercising it. The scale of its grant to SAQA is regarded as evidence of failure to take the NQF seriously.

The following suggestions were made about the resourcing and funding of SAQA:

- SAQA needs to be appropriately funded from the fiscus. This fiscus allocation could be channeled through both the DoE and DoL budgets.
- The joint responsibility of the DoE and DoL for the oversight of the NQF might be reinforced if both departments made budget allocations to SAQA.
- The funding of standards setting and quality assurance from SETA administrative budgets or discretionary strategic grant funds should be considered. This is necessary to the extent that the SETAs play a critical role in standards setting.
- SAQA should diversify its sources of funding. However, self-funding is regarded as very problematic. If costs are to be transferred to beneficiaries, this must be done in clearly limited circumstances and the level of the cost transfer must be carefully regulated. If it is not regulated the NQF will become inaccessible to the majority of its intended beneficiaries, the learners. Some suggest that SAQA should not transfer any costs of the system to learners because this would punish the poor and further depress access to learning. In this view the state should give SAQA the scope to meet its responsibility toward the provision of public education and training.
- Operational dependency on foreign donor funding should be scaled down.

SAQA's role

SAQA's oversight role in the implementation of the NQF is contentious throughout the system, as the following points from the submissions indicate:

Inflexibility

Respondents state that there is a measure of inflexibility and defensiveness within SAQA. HE cites SAQA's insistence on maintaining eight NQF levels as a case in point.

It is claimed that SAQA has been too technicist and bureaucratic in its oversight role, which makes it difficult for stakeholders to engage constructively and in substantive ways with the NQF. This has led to a form of technical compliance with SAQA requirements and rules. Respondents note that this approach will not help build the NQF. They argue for the space for open, honest and substantive engagement with the NQF discourse.

SAQA's capacity

Some respondents speak with appreciation of the support they receive from SAQA staff members. Many other submissions raise concerns about SAQA's lack of capacity and the impact this has on its ability to carry out its work effectively. The submissions note that this has affected SAQA's ability to provide leadership to the NQF, or adequate support to its structures and stakeholders. Some complain that some SAQA staff members have been unable to:

- provide basic information, respond to basic queries and perform basic administrative functions (such as organisation of transport and accommodation for meetings and timely payment of claims);

- provide adequate professional support to SAQA structures and stakeholders; and
- deal with the challenges of the Higher Education sector. The submissions note that higher education institutions complain that many SAQA staff lack experience at a senior level in Higher Education and thus have poor understanding of curriculum development and quality assurance processes in this sector or the responsibilities of professional bodies.

The factors that are seen to contribute to SAQA's lack of capacity include the perceived high levels of staff turnover and the organisation's apparent inability to recruit and retain people with appropriate skills and experience. It is suggested that an institutional audit of SAQA be undertaken to establish the main reasons for its inability to attract and retain highly competent staff. An appropriate level of funding of SAQA is considered essential to enable the Authority to deal with the problem.

Comments are made about the capacity of the Board. Collectively it is said to lack the ability to provide the required level of conceptual and strategic leadership to the NQF. Such critics believe that this is because the Board is a stakeholder-representative body that must constantly compromise positions among its members. SAQA's membership is considered to lack expertise in a number of key areas of the NQF, partly because the SAQA Act has not been amended to take account of new structures such as the SETAs or the CHE. While respondents expect the Board to provide a higher quality of strategic leadership, they suggest no specific alternative structures.

By contrast, SAQA is praised for the quality of the manuals and guidelines it has produced in the past few years. Respondents note that these materials are informative and of a high professional standard. Respondents also highly appreciate the capacity building workshops SAQA has run, and ask for more.

The role of SAQA-appointed NSB Coordinators is seen as being particularly critical for the effective working of the NSBs, which puts a high premium on their efficiency and professional competence. Some coordinators are highly praised for their capabilities and helpfulness, and their positive impact on the progress of their NSBs is warmly acknowledged. But the inefficiency and (in some cases) absence of other coordinators is considered disastrous.

Information and advocacy

Many submissions emphasize the need to enhance the profile of the NQF among the broad population of South Africa. For them this means a more vigorous multi-pronged communication strategy using multi-media approaches, including prime-time television, to communicate with the public. They also emphasize the need for a special focus on learners as the main beneficiaries of the NQF, enabling them to achieve better access to learning and make more informed choices. But providers, learners and employers need evidence that the NQF is not too idealistic and will be sustained in the long run. Its priorities and benefits need to be promoted strongly in a language that ordinary people can understand and relate to.

Standards setting

Several respondents report that participation in standards setting structures has been a positive experience for their members, making an invaluable contribution to individual members' professional development.

The problems related to standards setting are reported to be severe. The standards setting system is seen as poorly conceived, inefficient and ineffective.

Conceptual issues

Rigid compartmentalization of fields. The submissions state that while there is a need to classify standards into fields and sub-fields for the benefit of the users there is no need for the standards setting bodies themselves to become rigid compartments. They should "cross-pollinate" or operate across sub-fields where appropriate and necessary. The SAQA sub-structural organisation, where an SGB has to fall under one of the twelve NSBs, does not foster interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum design. The delineation of NQF fields and sub-fields is characterized by fragmentation and duplication. This occurs because of the lack of cross-linkages between NSBs that have overlapping interests. The problem also occurs within NSBs because different SGBs have been listed and registered by NSBs for apparently overlapping sub-fields. Decisions on recognition of SGBs seem inconsistent.

Chapter 3

Integration of education and training. A flexible and incremental approach to the integration of education and training is proposed in the areas of standards setting and quality assurance. The diversity of types and levels of learning, and the definitions of qualifications and standards, need to be fit for purpose. Thus it should be acknowledged that general/academic education and career-related/vocational training have different purposes and there should be a distinction between them within the same framework. However, there is a need to build bridges and manage the interface between these learning systems in order to avoid the narrow task drift and academic drift that many submissions were concerned about.

SETAs are thought by many to have a crucial role in creating learning systems that are responsive to labour market/economic needs. Thus they should be responsible for generating qualifications and standards that meet the needs of the labour market and also quality assuring them. Further, the band ETQAs should be responsible for standards setting and quality assurance of general education. However, SAQA has a crucial role in ensuring there are links between the two orientations to prevent them drifting apart.

HE academic policy and standards setting. The Study Team received submissions before the CHE's draft *New Academic Policy* document had been released. The absence of a conceptual framework for the registration, accreditation and approval of higher education qualifications has been greatly regretted. Several respondents consider themselves confused over who has responsibility for determining academic policy in higher education, the Minister of Education or SAQA. The Minister clearly has policy responsibility in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1995, but the Act requires that the CHE and HEQC must comply with SAQA's ETQA policies and criteria. (section 7(2))

A nested approach to standards setting for higher education. The HE submissions recommend a "nested approach" to higher education qualifications on the NQF. (This idea has since been incorporated in the CHE's draft *New Academic Policy* document and in SAQA's draft *Level Descriptors* document.) This approach would require the establishment of sectoral SGBs, under the auspices of CHE, to take responsibility for generating generic variants of the qualifications types. It would also imply a shift from the traditional SAQA-NSB-SGB route for standards setting in Higher Education, which this sector has been very unhappy about. The submissions argue that the nested model would allow greater flexibility and responsiveness on the part of providers than the current model and would be expected to lighten the bureaucratic burden on individual providers and ensure the development of better quality standards.⁽²⁾

Secondary schools and whole qualifications. By contrast, considerable concern is apparent that secondary schools will have no alternative but to continue as usual with whole qualifications. The problem is seen as two-fold. Firstly, it is argued that the adoption of a whole qualification for senior secondary schools will restrict the options open to learners in the FET band. Secondly, an alternative that offers both a whole qualification and optional unit standards will fragment the system along academic and vocational lines, where the academic stream is valued and the vocational stream is not.

Respondents seek clarity on how the DoE's intention to produce national curriculum statements for FET subjects will fit in with standards-based qualifications at the same levels in the same fields being delivered by non-DoE providers.

Pilot projects for standards. Submissions raise concerns about the fact that the standards generated have not yet been reviewed or tested (review is based on a three-year cycle). Some are considered to be unusable. They argue for pilots to test standards and develop best practice models for the system.

Capacity building for providers. Submissions state that providers do not understand how to use unit standards for learning programme development. They note that unless there is professional help in the form of capacity building, providers will use unit standards as blueprints for modules. Besides which, providers struggle not only

with the relationship between unit standards and learning programmes but with the relationship between standards in general and learning programmes. They find it difficult to translate standards and qualifications into programmes and learnerships. It was noted that providers have a critical role to play in the success of the NQF. Their ability to develop quality learning programmes and provide a quality service is one of the determining factors in NQF implementation.

Structural issues

Slow standards setting process. Respondents state that the standards generation structures have not proven themselves capable of producing all the requisite standards in all fields in a short period of time. Considering the number of standards that need to be produced in order to ensure that the system runs, the throughput of standards and qualifications needs to be speeded up and made more transparent. The development and setting of standards and qualifications takes too long, partly because it is a cumbersome and complex process reflecting SAQA's organizational complexity. The process must be simplified.

Many submissions state that the proliferation of standards setting structures makes the implementation of the NQF inefficient, complex and expensive in the use of both human and financial resources. There is a need to streamline the NSBs and SGBs, including making them fewer and smaller, to ensure their effectiveness. One submission suggests converting NSBs into working groups attached to SAQA's Standards Directorate with members being paid against output in place of attendance fees for meetings.

The fact that the standards generation process relies heavily on the volunteered time of busy individuals was frequently repeated. SAQA has invested strongly in skills development for SGB and NSB members but because members are reimbursed only for out of pocket expenses many cannot afford to continue. Worker members, in particular, cannot commit themselves to high-intensity involvement unless their employers give them paid time off. Regrettably many meetings are not quorate. Thus some NSBs have played little more than a cosmetic role.

The lack or inadequacy of funding for SGBs is one of the contributory factors to their inability to deliver quality standards in a short period of time. Evidence suggests that where SGBs have financial backing they have been able to generate standards more quickly and have sustained the participation of their members for longer. The submissions argue that funding needs to be devoted to prioritized standards generation. SAQA should create cost effective mechanisms to fund these structures.

Stakeholder participation in standards setting. The participation of stakeholders in standards setting is critically important. It ensures buy-in and the democratisation of the standards setting processes. However, under present arrangements many respondents feel the democratic process consumes copious amounts of time, energy and funds, including private funds. The SAQA system, they suggest, places too much emphasis on representivity and not enough on the technical ability and experience of members of these bodies. They feel that most stakeholder representatives have little experience or expertise in designing standards and qualifications and this has led to tensions between those who do and those who do not have expertise. Further, they feel the structures are too large and unmanageable. In practice stakeholder representivity is seen as one of the major reasons for the slowness of the standards setting process. Respondents strongly recommend that the criteria for nominating stakeholder representatives should be reviewed. More suitably qualified and technically competent people should participate.

Others argued that there needs to be a separation of stakeholder-based processes from expert-based processes. Those who have the expertise in standards generation, curriculum development and assessment should be supported to undertake it. Once standards have been drafted they should be referred to stakeholders for scrutiny, verification and approval to ensure that the criteria have been met.

Chapter 3

The role of SETAs in standards setting. Two contrasting views are expressed about the role of SETAs in standards setting. Although SETAs are functioning as ETQAs, many are currently also involved in standards generation to various degrees, despite the fact that SAQA's regulations require responsibility for the functions to be kept separate.

On the one hand, concerns are raised by stakeholders in the HE sector about the fact that the involvement of SETAs in standards generation, given the funding resources they command, could drive higher education institutions in directions that may not be consistent with the *National Plan for Higher Education*. For instance, they assert that SETAs are now shaping the qualifications landscape through shorter duration qualifications (two year diplomas) that are unit standards-based and oriented to the world of work in narrower ways than the customary technician three-year diplomas. Such unplanned but funded initiatives need to be revisited within the context of the relationship between education and training in Higher Education.

Further, they propose that a single central body, similar to the Interim Joint Committee (IJC) linking the CHE, DoE and SAQA, should be responsible for setting standards and quality assurance for Higher Education. In this view, SETAs' responsibility for standards and qualifications should not extend beyond the FET band, except under the auspices of this central body.

On the other hand, a strong feeling is reflected in the skills development stakeholders' submissions in particular that SETAs should be responsible for standards setting within their economic sectors. This need not conflict with their quality assurance role. In this view SETAs have proved that they have the resources and capacity to play a critical role in the generation of quality standards in a short period of time. Furthermore, additional resources can be made available to the SETAs for this important role, should the need arise. They see the SETAs' standards setting role as being particularly important in meeting the needs of each economic sector and taking forward the National Skills Development Strategy. Therefore sufficient authority should be given the SETAs to pursue a learning and qualifications agenda closely linked to their respective economic sectors.

Quality assurance

Respondents focused on the relationship between the band ETQAs (HEQC and GENFETQA) and the economic sector ETQAs (the SETAs and the professional bodies).

Many submissions stated that there is a need to clarify the roles of the various ETQAs to avoid ambiguity of functions, duplication, unhealthy competition, territorialism, and tensions in the system. The current memoranda of understanding are reported to be unmanageable, ineffective and insufficient to regulate the relationships among ETQAs.

All submissions on this matter insist that the proliferation of ETQAs has placed immense pressure on providers. The lack of clear jurisdiction, overlapping responsibilities and differing approaches to quality assurance have led to many problems. Respondents offer a number of recommendations to address the problem.

The Higher Education constituency emphasizes that the HEQC must be the principal ETQA for HE, particularly given the immense pressure on providers under the current arrangements, where at worst a single provider might be expected to respond to the requirements of up to 40 ETQAs. Other ETQAs, including SETAs, should only be involved in HE if they have been authorized by the HEQC.

This view is countered by the skills development constituency, which insists that economic sector ETQAs should not be subordinate, account to, be coordinated by or receive delegated responsibility from band ETQAs. SETA ETQAs should be embedded in the labour market and be responsive to the social partners. SAQA should coordinate the relationships among the ETQAs. All ETQAs should be bound by SAQA's arrangements and be accountable to SAQA and not to one another. Further, they suggest that band ETQAs should be responsible for quality assuring multi-purpose providers and individual SETAs have responsibility for single-purpose providers

Private providers argue that there is a need for a review of the current quality assurance arrangements in order to find a more effective alternative. They express particular frustration at the DoE's alleged refusal to register multi-purpose providers that offer short courses in the Higher Education band, and the HEQC's unwillingness to accredit short courses.

A Further Education and Training consortium is worried that the assessment for the FETC would follow the same "uninspired pathways" as the examination it replaces, with the emphasis on quantity of passes rather than the quality of the learning. Ominously, to them, the GENFETQA Bill, 2001 (now Act) seemed to adopt the same assessment language as that used by the previous education dispensation.

Summary of the main trends in the submissions

Commitment to NQF

Respondents unanimously support the objectives of the NQF and express disappointment and frustration at the slow progress in achieving them, especially in respect of the broad transformation of education and training.

Architecture of the NQF

The NQF architecture, which includes the structures, policies, regulations, procedures, and language, is unduly complex, confusing and unmanageable. This architecture is partly responsible for the lack of progress. It needs to be simplified.

Strategic co-ordination

The DoE and the DoL should play a strategic leadership role in the NQF. Together with SAQA they need to ensure that all implementation activity is coordinated and coherent. They need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various players in the field. This will help avoid contradictory policies and legislation, duplication and overlapping of powers and responsibilities, fragmented initiatives and waste of resources.

SAQA's governance

SAQA is governed by a cumbersome stakeholder-based board. This slows down decision-making and puts a premium on resolving inter-sectoral issues rather than providing clear strategic leadership. The structure of the Authority should be streamlined.

SAQA's funding

SAQA needs to be adequately funded, primarily through the fiscus, to be able to carry out its work effectively. Self-funding through fee charging, if adopted at all, should be strictly limited in order to ensure that there is no retrogressive impact on access to education and training. SAQA's over-reliance on donor funding needs to be scaled down.

SAQA's role and capacity

SAQA's oversight role has been experienced as bureaucratic, inflexible and defensive of current arrangements. It is also seen as unresponsive to the diverse needs of the various sectors in the NQF. SAQA is thought to lack needed capacity for leadership of the NQF, and professional and administrative support to its structures and NQF stakeholders.

Standards setting

The standards setting process is considered to be too cumbersome, slow, and inflexible, and does not take into account the diverse needs of the various sectors. The voluntary nature of the standards setting structures, the shortage of appropriate experience and expertise in them, and the inadequate funding for SGBs in particular are some of the factors that contribute to the slowness of the process.

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SETAs should be responsible for the development of standards for economic or career-oriented training. Band SGBs/ETQAs should be responsible for setting standards for the education and academic-oriented sectors. A “nested approach” to HE qualifications should be adopted. Such arrangements will ensure an NQF that is responsive to the needs of the diverse sectors.

Stakeholder involvement

The involvement of stakeholders in standards setting processes is critical. However, there should be a separation of stakeholder-based and expert-based processes given the lack of experience and expertise among most stakeholder representatives. Those who have the appropriate experience and expertise should develop standards, and stakeholder-based processes should be used for scrutiny, verification and approval.

Quality assurance

There is a proliferation of quality assurance structures with unclear lines of responsibility and different approaches. This causes confusion and puts immense pressure on providers. The DoE, DoL and SAQA should clarify the roles, responsibilities and relationships between the SETAs, the professional bodies and the band ETQAs as a matter of urgency.

Summary of the sponsoring departments’ submissions

Department of Education

Structure and function perspective. The DoE fully commits itself to building and strengthening the development and implementation of the NQF. However the Department is concerned about the structures and functionality of the NQF and its implementation over the past five years. Broad issues of principle are put to the Study Team for consideration. These stem from the experiences of senior officials.

Strategic perspective. According to the DoE, SAQA’s approach to implementing the NQF has lacked strategic perspective and a clear set of priorities for attaining the core objectives of the NQF. SAQA’s approach has resulted in an unduly bureaucratic structure which has lost sight of the core principles of the NQF.

The DOE asserts that the political imperatives that informed the development of the NQF have not been translated into effective procedures and practices to advance the political and social goals of the SAQA Act. Examples are the slow progress of initiatives for the schooling system and the recognition of prior learning.

Prioritisation in standards setting. The DoE submission notes concern with the proliferation of standards and qualifications and asserts that relatively unimportant and less subscribed standards and qualifications have been developed and little has yet been done in relation to the majority of programmes that have social and economic relevance.

Quality assurance bodies. The DoE also refers to the numerous quality assurance bodies currently operating in the education and training system and suggests a need for greater coordination.

Capacity. The DoE raises concerns about the capacity of SAQA and its sub-structures to deal with the processes of standards setting and quality assurance in Higher Education. It notes that a wide range of learnerships, and certificates, diplomas and other qualifications have been registered or proposed as appropriate to Higher Education. However, the criteria used in the approval of narrow qualifications are unknown to the DoE and it is unclear how the requirements of high-level cognitive and intellectual development have been addressed, if at all.

Broad versus narrow learning. The DoE further notes that increasingly there is a tendency to associate all learning with a specific job-related and market-oriented competency or skill, and general formative qualifications are being devalued. This trend, it argues, has promoted the over-specialisation of learning and could lead to the demise of independent critical learning and intellectual development and the attenuation of the broader humanist goals of the education system.

It also states that a narrow, vocational orientation to education and training pays little attention to the requirements of the Ministry's *National Plan for Higher Education* which seeks to engender a complex array of "programme and qualification mixes" and not merely qualifications directed at specific technical and professional competencies.

Governance. Four areas of concern are noted:

- *Relationship of SAQA to the Minister.* The DoE is concerned about the lack of clarity in the relationship between the Board and the Minister on the issue of policy authority. A determination must be made about who has authority in respect of the initiation and promulgation of regulations and policies in respect of the qualifications framework.
- *The role and composition of the SAQA Board.* The DoE believes that for a number of reasons, the SAQA Board has not been able to provide the necessary oversight required for the development of the NQF. It recommends a re-examination of the forms of and criteria for representation on the Board, so that SAQA is able to give focused, strategic leadership to the institutions of the NQF.
- *Role of DoE and DoL in the Board.* Currently DoE and DoL are seen to participate as "stakeholders" in the Board. However the departments are key agencies having national mandates and representing national interests. At present this is not recognised since they have no more authority than a diverse group of persons representing particularistic and sectoral interests. Due recognition should be accorded to the critical nature of the DoE's mandate and the demands of educational transformation.
- *Private providers* appear to have an inordinately large influence on the role of the NQF in the public sector. This has direct implications for the way in which the constitutional and legislative mandate of government is discharged.

Capacity. SAQA's weak capacity to discharge its role is considered by the DoE to be pervasive and indisputable. The institutional capacity and qualities required in the leadership of the Authority need urgent discussion. The tide of divisive tensions must be stemmed, such as the tension over the roles of GENFETQA and the HEQC in the accreditation of GET, FET and HET qualifications respectively.

Funding. The DoE recognises that state funding is essential to provide stability and certainty to the work of the NQF. It asserts that the state's contribution must assure the essential high-level human and other resources necessary for the development of the NQF and its institutions, as a priority. The level of this contribution must bear reference to the quality and content of the importance of the NQF work.

The DoE raises two concerns with proposed funding strategies:

- The Department supports SAQA's intention to diversify the sources of its income by offering to "sell" its services on the market, but sounds a note of caution. The demands of the market cannot be equated with SAQA's responsibility to the public education system as a whole and a proper balance must be maintained in SAQA's orientation to the relationship between the private and public spheres of education and training. It would be untenable if financial demands were made on the public schools.
- SAQA's wish to create regional offices would add to the proliferation of SAQA institutions, exacerbate the capacity and efficiency problems and cause a further drain on SAQA's resources.

Structural impediments. In conclusion DoE asserts that a number of structural conditions impede the progress of the NQF:

- The conception of the NQF that informed the policy debates and the making of policies prior to and at the inception of the democratic government must be re-examined in the light of subsequent experience and developments.
- SAQA's role relative to other important institutions such as the Departments of Education and Labour and SAQA's prerogative to initiate policy must be clarified.
- SAQA's role must be assessed with reference to a realistic budget for its work.
- The powers and authority of SAQA's associated structures must be clarified so that the prevailing confusion about the mandates of these bodies is also dealt with.

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Department of Labour

Labour market and training perspective. The DoL approaches the NQF from a labour market and training perspective. It has a mandate from the Skills Development Act, 1998 for training in and for the labour market through the implementation of learnerships and skills programmes in and for employment.

The DoL argues that there is an urgent need to dramatically expand access to learning in the country. Even if the traditional routes to FET and HE were expanded that would not come close to meeting national needs. Thus learning in the workplace is the only viable option for opening up access pathways. Without such interventions the majority of South Africans are destined to remain very poor, through unemployment, poor work opportunities or because of low returns from survivalist activities.

DoL's suggested strategy is to:

- ensure that learning happens in areas of employment growth;
- link to employers able to provide work experience;
- implement learnerships as rapidly as possible;
- develop a wide spectrum of qualifications; and
- develop new qualifications to assist access to training paths.

The DoL has reservations about traditional learning institutions meeting the challenges and needs of the economic sector. Their concern is that these institutions are likely to give more weight to the "academic content" of learning than its application and use. At the same time it notes a danger of becoming too focused and locked into task specific training, and proposes that oversight should occur to ensure that there is neither academic drift nor task drift in programme designs. DoL argues therefore for strengthening the voice of the organised labour market actors within the SAQA system, that is the economic sector ETQAs (the SETAs).

Many of the conclusions and recommendations of the Department are motivated by the aim of creating sufficient authority and autonomy for SETAs to pursue a learning and qualifications agenda closely linked to employment and self-employment.

SETAs and standards. SETAs should be given the right to set standards, and to quality assure them, but the standards set and qualifications designed must be scrutinised by SAQA before final registration to ensure that they are actually at the level proposed, contain Critical Outcomes and incorporate adequate fundamental elements.

SETAs and professional bodies should therefore have the right to convene SGBs. Similar rights should be accorded in general education. In brief:

- SETAs should work in collaboration with professional bodies. The relationship between SETAs and professional bodies should be strengthened.
- SETAs should be allowed to develop standards for qualifications at Higher Education level if there is need to do so.
- Qualifications should be defined on the NQF as general or career related and a structured set of rules should govern the movement of learners between the two.

SETAs and band ETQAs. The Department of Labour strongly rejects the proposition that the economic sector ETQAs should in some way account to or be coordinated by the band ETQA. This would be tantamount to saying that formal education institutions should control the standards of learning in the labour market, which many, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), agree they are poorly equipped to do.

SAQA's role. The DoL believes that SAQA has a key set of roles to play and its authority to do so should be clearly acknowledged by all the actors. SAQA should remain the custodian of the NQF and should retain an arm's length relationship from the state and from the private sector in order to do this. SAQA must also remain accountable to the Ministers of Labour and Education, but in a new way. SAQA must principally account to the Minister of Education on all matters pertaining to the "general education" stream and the Minister of Labour in relation to the "career-related" stream. Funding streams could be similarly associated.

Funds. SAQA must be resourced and financed by the state at a level that permits it to carry out its functions. The cost of the system must only be transferred to the beneficiaries in clearly limited circumstances and the level of the cost transfer must be carefully regulated. Operational dependency on foreign donor inputs must be scaled down within a period of no more than five years. The skills development levy can assist in the financing of the broader NQF functions, such as standards setting, to the extent that SETAs are involved in this area.

SAQA's role in vocational and professional training. The DoL is concerned to see that SAQA develops the space required for a strong (and linked) vocational and professional training system to emerge alongside a strong general education system. This would be a shift, but the Department believes that a system that fails to recognise the different purposes of general and career-related qualifications will unwittingly favour one over the other. Such a trend would not be in the interest of the country or the individuals that undertake either form of qualification.

Conclusion

Taking the departmental and all other submissions together, there is all-round support for the establishment of the NQF and for the NQF objectives. There is general disappointment that the broad transformation of education and training has made such slow progress, especially in respect to access, progression and redress. The Department of Labour lays particular emphasis on the national skills gap, especially at the post-grade 12 level, where school-leavers have totally inadequate opportunities for further learning and economically valuable employment. DoE considers that SAQA has become mired in bureaucratic complication and has allowed itself to lose sight of the core social and political goals of the SAQA Act. Standards and qualifications are multiplying but, it believes, not in the areas with the most social and economic relevance.

Both the DoE and DoL assert that strategic priorities for the NQF must be set, but they present mirror-image perceptions of the current threats to the education and training system from the institutional machinery of NQF implementation. DoL fears that the band ETQAs are seeking undue influence over career-focused training, in which they (and the formal system of provision they represent) have little if any experience. According to DoL, backed by the skills development cluster of respondents, quality assured standards and qualifications for labour market-related, career-focused training are the particular mandate of the SETAs. By contrast, DoE fears that the financial power of the SETAs is already unduly influencing providers in the direction of unit standards-based qualifications without regard for the national policies and plans of the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education cluster of respondents strongly supports this position. Nevertheless each department is against both academic drift and vocational drift in the design of standards and qualifications.

Respondents want a radical simplification of NQF architecture, strong leadership by the government and a clarification of the roles of all the leading players: the departments, SAQA, and the standards setting and quality assurance bodies. They favour a streamlined SAQA Board that will speed up decision-making and smaller standards setting structures that give scope to high quality expertise, but they insist that stakeholder bodies must have a gatekeeping responsibility for standards and qualifications. DoE agrees with these propositions. It also wants to see the end of confusion between the Minister of Education's policy and legislative prerogatives and SAQA's. On the other hand, the DoL is looking to a particular solution for the relationship between SAQA and the departments. It asserts the necessity for SAQA to operate at arm's length from government, but proposes that SAQA should report and account separately to the Minister of Education and Minister of Labour with respect to "general education" and "career-related" learning respectively.

Respondents insist that the government must take up the burden of funding the NQF and drastically reduce SAQA's reliance on donor grants. Both departments agree that SAQA must be funded by the state at a level that enables it to carry out its proper functions, with the required quality of staff and other resources it needs for the implementation of the NQF. Both agree that user charges have limited application and that the level of cost transfer to the beneficiaries of the NQF must be strictly controlled. In particular, DoE argues that a market approach to SAQA's services has little place in the system of public provision and no place in public schools. DoL considers that the skills development levy could be used to support the SETAs' involvement in standards setting.

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Overall, there is broad consensus about the main obstacles in the way of implementing the NQF, and many suggestions for improvement have much in common. However, there are important differences of perspective between the two sponsoring departments, each of which has general support for its position from its own constituency.

Endnotes

- (1) Department of Education, *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Pretoria, 1998); Ministry of Education, *National Plan for Higher Education* (Pretoria, February 2001); Department of Education, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa: Report of the National Working Group to the Minister of Education* (Pretoria: December 2001).
- (2) CHE, *New Academic Policy*, p. 45; SAQA, *Development of Level Descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework* [document for public comment], *Government Gazette*, Notice No. 1247 (3 December 2001), pp. 36-37.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework is a product of South Africa's democratic transformation. It was brought into existence on the strength of an intense collaboration among South Africans in the labour movement and its political allies, organised business, academics, trainers and NGO specialists.

The NQF concept seemed to meet the needs of the times, which was to create democratic institutional responses to the country's history of division, suppression and inequality. It offered a radical departure from all past South African practice in education and training. It promised an entirely new education and training dispensation for workers, an open-ended scheme of progression for learners of all ages, along high-quality learning and career pathways which would blast through the educational and occupational roadblocks and dead-ends installed by the apartheid regime. It seemed like a particularly dynamic contribution to the national Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Although the NQF is home-grown, its main concepts and organising principles are in a line of lineal descent from similar movements in Scotland, England, New Zealand and Australia in the mid to late 1980s. These movements were closely investigated by the South Africans who worked in the National Training Board's National Training Strategy Initiative, the ANC's education and HRD policy process prior to 1994, the Inter-Ministerial Working Group in 1994-95 and the NQF development process from 1996 onwards.

Intellectual and professional exchange on national qualifications frameworks and related matters has flourished world-wide during the past fifteen years and more. As in South Africa, intense debates have accompanied the construction of NQFs elsewhere, in both national and multilateral forums. The international movement to establish national qualifications systems is being advanced both by the exchange or transfer of experience between individual nations and by the explicit actions of regional and international bodies.

South Africa is an active participant in this international exchange. On the bilateral level South Africa has from the outset been open to international scrutiny and has invited critique and technical support. In turn, SAQA has willingly offered advice and expertise to others who show interest. For example, SAQA's Chairperson and Executive Officer recently conducted an induction course for newly appointed members of the second Namibia Qualifications Authority Council. The SAQA office is a frequent host to interested delegations from other countries, African and otherwise, and SAQA in turn currently receives technical assistance from Europe and Canada in particular. SAQA contributes to the movement to harmonise qualification systems within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and is a member of the International Benchmarking Group of nations that share experience on the development of standards and qualifications frameworks. South African representatives play a significant role in the debates on these issues and related human resource development matters in the International Labour Conference.⁽¹⁾

It is fitting, therefore, that our Study Team has expert members from New Zealand, Scotland and England, and that our terms of reference require us to assess

“relevant and contemporary international developments on national qualifications frameworks with reference to policies, regulatory frameworks and implementation procedures and their implications for NQF practice and future directions”.⁽²⁾

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We will outline the main features of the contemporary international experience so that South Africa's NQF can be viewed in its full context. We will then discuss a number of inferences that South Africans could draw from that experience. The Study Team is aware that extrapolating lessons from one country's experience to another is not a straightforward matter. Even when the underlying problems seem essentially similar there are always significant contextual differences. With this proviso we will concentrate on several aspects of the international experience that resonate with what our respondents have told us about South Africa's NQF implementation. In the next chapter we will distill a set of principles to guide the Study Team's analysis and recommendations. They are meant to assist the NQF community and the government to better understand the power of the NQF concept and its limitations, and on that basis find appropriate solutions.

The international character of national qualifications systems

A world-wide movement

The NQF concept has spread to all continents and is still gathering strength. It might be too soon to declare that qualifications frameworks in some form will permanently change the way in which all education and training systems work, but the concept has recently attracted impressive endorsements from the world education and training community. So long as the conditions that gave rise to NQFs persist there is every likelihood that the NQF idea will continue to spread and evolve.⁽³⁾

A diverse movement

All countries have qualifications. Some have a legislated hierarchy of qualifications. A growing number, including South Africa, have custom-designed, comprehensive national qualifications frameworks that link to broader national educational and social objectives. These tend to have been inspired by the same founding models in Britain and Australasia. Seen against the long history of education and training systems they are very contemporary. None is yet twenty years old and some have been born only in the past few months. No two are identical. They share a similar and rather stable set of objectives, but their scope and legal basis varies greatly and their institutional architecture is equally diverse. Moreover, each NQF has been formed in a highly dynamic policy flux. Except for the very newest, each has had false starts and major course corrections along the way, often following a comprehensive policy review. This puts the current South African exercise in good company.

Although the concept of a national qualifications framework now has wide currency, the term is used differently in different contexts. Sometimes it refers to a framework for technical and vocational education only. In other cases it covers only the higher education system. In the dominant tradition of continental Europe the phrase generally denotes a uniform national framework of qualifications for the whole of higher education or the two parts of a binary system, which is enforced in institutions by statute or administrative orders. In that sense a British study noted as late as 1997 that Britain was almost the only country in Europe without an NQF for higher education.⁽⁴⁾

By contrast South Africa shares the newer NQF tradition that installs a collaborative process for developing nationally registered and quality assured standards and qualifications based on expected learning outcomes, and in South Africa's case the NQF covers the entire national system of education and training without exception.

In some countries with federal systems there is a constitutional barrier to establishing a national qualifications framework of the South African kind, because the national government has limited jurisdiction over state or provincial education and training matters. The United States, Canada and Germany are cases in point. (By contrast, the Australian federal government has maximised its own limited national responsibility by formally negotiating and codifying the Australian Qualifications Framework with all the state and territory governments.) In varying degrees, however, many such countries and their constituent state or provincial governments have responded to the same range of impulses that have given rise to NQFs in other countries. Much creative statecraft is being invested in efforts to develop national skills standards (for example in the United States and Mexico) or to create new and explicitly comparable qualifications structures in higher education and technical and vocational education (for example in the member states of the European Union). However varied the scope and legislative arrangements for NQFs (or proto-NQFs) may be, there is nevertheless a perceptible worldwide convergence of aim.

NQFs in context

NQFs look both inward and outward. By name they are national. In outlook they are international. The national impulse reflects governments' wish to democratise access to high quality skills and learning and align education and training provision to the skills and knowledge needed by 21st century societies. The international impulse reflects and responds to the rapid increase in interdependence among nations, the world-wide homogenisation of institutions, the globalisation of expertise, finance, trade and communications, and the necessity for countries to compete successfully in international markets in order to survive and prosper. The two orientations are neatly captured by one of the architects of the New Zealand qualifications reform, which he describes as a commitment to "seamless lifelong learning to international standards for all New Zealanders".⁽⁵⁾

The main characteristics of reform initiatives in New Zealand, Australia, England, Scotland and the United States are summarised in a 1995 Canadian study. Although derived from five countries' experience, these points have far wider application:

- "The countries view reforms as preparation for competition in the knowledge-based global economy
 - national standards/qualifications are the basis of international articulation negotiations
 - growing acceptance of competency-based standards and modularized curriculum will enhance world-wide portability
 - electronic technologies will enable global information systems, delivery systems and workforce mobility

- "The old dichotomy between training and education has blurred
 - new focus adopted on lifelong learning, a "learning culture", and the related concept of the learning organization
 - emphasis on strong basic skills for all
 - workers and youths are being prepared for restructured work organizations requiring teamwork, analytical and communication skills

- "The social partners support, and are involved in, major reforms, including
 - industry or enterprise-based standards
 - multi-skilling
 - more flexible, responsive delivery systems for continuing education

- "There is increased emphasis on quality assurance
 - more rigorous accreditation of providers
 - concern with best practice internationally
 - assessment and monitoring of provision

- "The institutional providers are becoming more responsive to client needs
 - greater market influences
 - service standards created
 - non-traditional delivery strengthened

- "There are major initiatives to strengthen school-to-work programs
 - time-based apprenticeship model replaced by competency based
 - secondary school occupational programs strengthened for the majority, who do not go to university
 - various pre-apprenticeship pathways linked to traineeships

- "Programs are targeted to ensure equity group participation in the future economy."⁽⁶⁾

This could almost serve as a check-list or agenda for contemporary reforming governments, all of whom tend to explain and justify the introduction of national qualifications frameworks by reference to a strikingly similar set of goals and instruments. Governments and NQF advocates give different aspects greater emphasis depending on their countries' relative wealth or poverty, social inequality and degree of integration into the world economy, but the overall scheme is not in dispute.

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NQFs do not stand alone, but keep company with a range of other state initiatives undertaken in collaboration with the social partners and providers. These necessarily include, as in South Africa, reforms of curriculum and assessment systems, as well as human resource development strategies, skills development strategies, labour market information systems, career guidance and job placement services. The most comprehensive and authoritative global statement on these matters was adopted by the International Labour Conference (ILC) at its 88th session in Geneva in 2000.

NQF developments world-wide

The movement to develop national qualifications frameworks (or related initiatives such as national standards setting bodies) is occurring at three inter-dependent levels: international organisations, regional organisations and national governments (as well as state or provincial governments where appropriate). At each level, depending on the context, there is substantial involvement by non-governmental bodies representing business, labour, university leaders, teachers, trainers and (in Europe at least) students, to name some of the main players.

The process is highly interactive. National policies influence the formal positions adopted in regional and international organisations. In turn such positions act as normative instruments designed to influence the behaviour of states, social partners and stakeholders. International and regional organisations set up programmes to assist governments to establish or develop NQFs. Bilateral and multilateral agreements, aid flows, technical assistance contracts and government-promoted trade in education services carry ideas and expertise from one state to another and one part of the world to another. The internet accelerates the flow of knowledge and ideas.

The following pages describe significant aspects of the current state of NQF developments in three arenas: international organisations, regional organisations and national governments.

International organisations

International Labour Organisation

The International Labour Conference (ILC) is the policy-setting body of the United Nations International Labour Organisation (ILO). It is a tripartite structure, representing governments, organised employers and organised labour. Its "Conclusions concerning human resource development and training" were hailed by the employers' spokesperson as "state of the art" and by the workers' spokesperson, the South African workers' delegate Ebrahim Patel, as "visionary and full of insight".

Mr Patel provided a vivid context for the debate on the HRD document. He contrasted the "promise fulfilled" in the Internet age, yielding "a process of knowledge-sharing unparalleled in human history", with the "promise unfulfilled" represented by the world's 885 million adult illiterates "who are unable to use the intellectual tools even of the old economy".

"The Committee's task was to come up with a set of conclusions which identifies the role of human resources development and training for both these realities, with a view to harnessing the potential of education and training to transform our world, and our shared social and human reality, so that every person can achieve their full human potential and every country may acquire the capacity to address the challenges facing its citizens."⁽⁷⁾

The emphasis on education and training is a striking feature of the document, which affirms that "Education and training are a right for all", that "Education cannot be separated from training", and that "Education and training have distinct but converging outcomes as society is changing". The document advocates social dialogue and partnership leading to "a coordinated education and training policy at national level" and long-term strategies formulated by governments in consultation with the social partners and integrated with economic and employment policies.

These positions broke new ground for the ILC. In this spirit the 88th International Labour Conference commended the establishment of NQFs:

“The development of a national qualifications framework is in the interest of enterprises and workers as it facilitates lifelong learning, helps enterprises and employment agencies match skill demand and supply, and guides individuals in their choice of training and career. The framework should consist of a number of elements: appropriate, transferable, broad and industry-based and professional competency standards, established by the social partners, that reflect the skills required in the economy and public institutions, and vocational and academic qualifications; and a credible, fair and transparent system of assessment of skills learned and competencies gained, irrespective of how and where they have been learned, e.g. through formal and non-formal education and training, work experience and on-the-job learning.”⁽⁸⁾

The Conference mandated the ILO's involvement in support of NQF development. The ILO was directed to undertake a review of the organisation's Human Resources Development Recommendation, 1975 (No. 150) in the light of the Conclusions of the debate at the 88th Conference. The terms of reference of the review include the promotion of “national, regional and international qualifications frameworks which include provisions for prior learning”. The ILC also directed the ILO to develop a database of best practices in developing a national qualifications framework, conduct a general study on the comparability of different NQFs, and undertake research into the recognition of prior learning.⁽⁹⁾

In response the ILO has commissioned studies to assess the experience of individual countries in developing NQFs, for example in Mexico, South Africa and the United Kingdom. In collaboration with other bodies the ILO is supporting enquiry into the establishment of national qualifications frameworks, as in a new Caribbean project on Competency-based Curriculum Design, or rendering technical advice and assistance to help a government establish an NQF, as in Mauritius, or developing a “model national qualifications framework that can be emulated by the countries in the [Asia and Pacific] region”.⁽¹⁰⁾

UNESCO

Unlike the ILC, the UNESCO General Conference does not appear to have developed an explicit formal position in favour of NQFs, but for decades the organisation has supported work on the equivalence of qualifications in higher education and technical and vocational education.⁽¹¹⁾

The recommendations of the UNESCO Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education at Seoul in 1999 went further. In a statement that anticipated the ILC Conclusions the following year, the TVE Congress advocated a new holistic approach to TVE, insisting that it is a vital part of general education. It recommended that education in the new century should incorporate all domains of learning and foster “seamless pathways for learners”, with emphasis on articulation, accreditation and RPL. The 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference meeting in Paris in November 2001 commended the Seoul Congress recommendations and incorporated similar sentiments in its Revised Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education (2001).⁽¹²⁾

UNESCO and ILO are collaborating in a Working Group on TVET to promote and reinforce co-operation between the two bodies in this area. One of the topics under consideration is the possibility of “co-operation on a project to establish a Regional Qualification Framework in Southern Africa”, a proposal whose origin is discussed further below. This is part of a new initiative of UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Bonn to stimulate sub-regional co-operation on TVET. Similar initiatives in collaboration with the ILO are planned for West Africa, the Arab States, South Asia, Central Asia and the small Pacific Island States.⁽¹³⁾

OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), comprising 30 highly industrialised, democratic member states, has undertaken research on education for decades. It has played a significant role in investigating and stimulating debate among its members on the role of education and training in economic and

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social development, and has been a consistent champion of recurrent (or lifelong) education through closer articulation between the world of education and the world of work. The OECD has taken a broad view of the objectives of education and has opposed “the simple identification of education with economic objectives”.⁽¹⁴⁾

Last year, for the first time in its history, the OECD “placed education at the top of the organisation’s priorities”. In April 2001 OECD Education ministers considered the theme “Investing in competencies for all”, where “competencies” is understood to cover knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.⁽¹⁵⁾

The OECD has taken a keen interest in the NQF phenomenon in relation to lifelong learning and is preparing a significant research programme of case studies of NQFs in a number of countries. While several member states of the OECD have NQFs or are engaged in developing them, many others do not, and the research interest does not reflect a consensus view among the OECD experts concerned about the value of the NQF approach.⁽¹⁶⁾

Regional organisations

European Union

The states of the European Union are engaged in several initiatives that reflect a desire to harmonise qualifications, make them more transparent, and encourage the creation of “a European qualification area”.⁽¹⁷⁾

The impulse to do so arises from the same set of global factors to which the OECD, UNESCO and the ILO have responded. In addition, the harmonisation of education systems is an expression of Europe’s over-arching project of unification based on common cultural and intellectual traditions, democratic practice, free market institutions, free movement within the Community and the advancement of human rights. By achieving a stronger community of learning in Europe its leaders also hope to equip the EU to equal and exceed the competitive strength of its main economic rival, the United States. At the same time, Europe’s formal statements value the humane and socially responsive values of the liberal education tradition. Thus the integration of learning systems is taken as the basis of a new, “post-ideological” approach to education reform. The EU is placing great emphasis on the development of dialogue on these matters with non-member European states, and has a programme of assistance to support education and training reform in such countries.⁽¹⁸⁾

The EU’s higher education initiative is particularly impressive. In 1997 at Lisbon the member states adopted a convention on the recognition of qualifications in which the states undertook to “establish transparent systems for the complete description of the qualifications obtained”.⁽¹⁹⁾

The following year the ministers responsible for higher education in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom issued a joint declaration on the harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system, in order to create “an open European area for higher learning” and “a Europe of knowledge”. They advocated a common structure of qualifications and the use of credits to assure quality and encourage mobility.⁽²⁰⁾

Their declaration was well received. After a year of consultation within the higher education community, the European Ministers of Education issued a joint declaration at Bologna that announced plans to consolidate “The European Higher Education Area”. They called for a managed process, involving all governments and stakeholders, to accelerate the convergence of higher education systems within a decade on a “system of easily readable and comparable degrees”. This would be based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, with a system of credits to promote student mobility. In principle this would represent a profound alteration in the customary practice of continental Europe based on tightly state-regulated national systems of long cycle awards. Several factors are said to account for the initiative:

“the creation of a real European labour market; the end of the ‘natural’ growth of university enrolment; the emergence of new global suppliers; and the acknowledgement that European higher education is currently a jungle of degrees, institutions and systems where it is easy to get lost”.⁽²¹⁾

The organised European higher education community strongly supports these moves but sees in them a danger of excessive state-driven uniformity and control, in the service of a dominant ethic of economic competitiveness. They want governments to provide a framework for co-ordination and guidance towards convergence, but not to create a Europe-sized straitjacket. At their meeting in Salamanca in March 2001 they warned that the promise of the Bologna Declaration would remain unfulfilled “if the current over-regulation and minute administrative and financial control of higher education in many countries is upheld”.

The higher education leaders envisaged convergence occurring on the basis of sufficient self-regulation to ensure the minimum level of cohesion. They advised dealing with diversity as an asset “rather than a reason for non-recognition or exclusion”, and argued that “competition serves quality in higher education, is not exclusive of co-operation and cannot be reduced to a commercial concept”. They emphasised that quality was “the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area”. Trust would be built by establishing mechanisms at European level to enable “the mutual acceptance of quality assurance outcomes, with ‘accreditation’ as one possible option”. Such mechanisms should respect diversity and not overload universities.⁽²²⁾

Their message was heeded by the European Ministers at their follow-up meeting in Prague in May 2001, who incorporated these phrases in their own communique, and declared themselves in favour of “a common framework of qualifications” and coherent quality assurance mechanisms. They called on the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (enqa) in co-operation with the higher education community to establish a common framework of reference and disseminate best practice, and endorsed a credit system to aid student mobility based on the EU’s European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).⁽²³⁾

The Ministers proposed expanding the use of the Diploma Supplement in order to improve the portability and transparency of qualifications. This is a document in standard EU format that is attached to a learner’s award certificate. It clearly defines for each programme “the objectives and learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and of competencies and skills”.⁽²⁴⁾

Meanwhile the EU is pursuing an active programme of co-operation with Latin American and Caribbean governments in the field of higher education, including strategies to advance student mobility and the convergence of qualifications. These goals reflect decisions made by the executive heads of Latin American and European universities in terms of their COLUMBUS programme. Noting that the processes of regional co-operation in higher education in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean create incentives and opportunities for inter-regional collaboration, the university leaders in November 2000 adopted “The Turin Action Plan for Euro-Latin American University Co-operation”. The Plan’s first priority is “the restructuring of higher education systems in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean in a convergent way in order to create more comparability and compatibility. This would involve “promoting a regional framework for higher education qualifications in each region”. The Plan also endorses the need for more flexible credit-based curricula and the diversification of access and educational paths through RPL and other measures.⁽²⁵⁾

A European accreditation system covering technical and vocational skills is also being planned by the EU based on a co-operative venture involving higher education, business, vocational sectors, local chambers of commerce and the social partners. The portability of credits is to be achieved by developing a credit system equivalent to ECTS and encouraging transparency in awards and certification through the work of the European Forum on Transparency of Vocational Qualifications. The EU is also mounting an innovative project to create a voluntary “knowledge accreditation system” and the award of “personal skills cards” recording credits obtained in “key skills”.⁽²⁶⁾

The European Union has an active programme of knowledge sharing and technical assistance with the European states that are candidates for EU membership. The European Training Foundation, based in Turin, is an agency of the European Union that assists “transition countries” from Central and Eastern Europe to prepare themselves to meet the criteria for EU membership.

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At a seminar in May 2001 it was concluded that all international organisations were moving towards a common methodology for standards setting in vocational education, based on an employment specification, an assessment specification and a learning specification. The participants identified the shift in standards setting from input-based systems towards transparent systems describing learning outcomes.

“Industrialised and developing countries all over the world are looking for ways to ensure a better link between the world of education and the world of work. Standards are seen as an important instrument to achieve that....[It] is clear that there is need for the development of an institutional platform, that encourages the involvement of social partners in the development of standards.”⁽²⁷⁾

In consequence, the ETF is working with non-member European states, such as Slovenia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to help them establish national qualifications frameworks. In the Slovene case the objective is:

“A transparent National Qualification Structure covering full and partial qualifications as a basic component of a Life Long Learning system and a necessary instrument for mutual recognition of qualifications.”

The Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is the collaborating partner with the Slovene authorities. An expected outcome of the project is a model NQS that will be available to neighbouring former Yugoslav countries for adaptation and implementation.⁽²⁸⁾

The ETF also has technical co-operation relations with Arabic-speaking Mediterranean states. At a meeting in April 2001 on standards development and the transparency of qualifications it was agreed that the region had excellent scope for collaboration, provided they could agree on a common framework before starting the arduous task of defining standards. Avoiding unnecessary duplication would also save money.⁽²⁹⁾

It is fitting to note that the European Union has been the main financial sponsor of South Africa's NQF.

Southern African Development Community

Representatives from several SADC member states attended the SAQA launch conference in 1996, including Namibia, which had recently announced its own intention to establish an NQF. An informal meeting of these representatives agreed that the NQF initiative should be taken up by SADC's HRD sector. When in 1997 a SADC Protocol on Education and Training was signed and ratified by the member states, its “ultimate objective” was to progressively achieve over a 20-year period “the equivalence, harmonisation and standardisation of the education and training systems in the Region”. In 1999, during the Protocol development process, SADC Ministers of Education had endorsed the idea of a Regional Qualifications Framework.⁽³⁰⁾

The Executive Officer of SAQA was elected as the first chairperson of the Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation established by the Protocol, an office that rotates annually among the member countries. SAQA has remained an active member of the committee. With a grant from the Danish development co-operation agency (DANIDA) the Executive Officer has established a SADC Desk and appointed an internal SADC Task Team to support its work.

The idea of a regional qualifications framework for the SADC countries was on the agenda of a workshop in Botswana in December 2000. The workshop inaugurated “Learning for Life, Work and the Future (LLWF)”, a project for sub-regional co-operation jointly initiated by the UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training and the Botswana Ministry of Education's Department of Vocational Education and Training. The LLWF initiative is designed to foster professional intra-regional networks of co-operation in TVET through donor-financed projects designed and implemented within the region with technical assistance from UNESCO.

A first draft proposal for “The Development of a Regional Qualifications Framework” was prepared by representatives of Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland and Botswana. Subsequently Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa expressed a willingness to develop an RQF with the technical and financial assistance of donors. The aim of the project is to:

“deliver quality vocational training through an improved system of accreditation with more developed linkages to employers; curriculum development; enhanced trainer training to improve staff capacity; improved training delivery with flexible scheduling. Training standards will be established in accordance with Member States’ National Qualifications Frameworks, and later a Regional Framework, which will form the basis for accreditation and determination of equivalences of qualifications including accreditation of trainers. [A Regional Authorising Board on the lines of the CARICOM model in the Caribbean was suggested.] The accreditation process will include the validation of standards of teaching, assessment and grading. [A Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) is envisaged.] A register of accredited training institutions and programmes and awards they offer as well as awarding bodies shall be compiled and reviewed periodically.”

It was suggested that a regional institution might need to be built up in one of the member countries to provide leadership, organisation and management for the regional qualifications programme. In the first place a centralised hub for networking and data provision was considered essential.

Both the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre and the ILO have expressed interest in participating in the project, which is expected to commence with a donor feasibility study.⁽³¹⁾

The SAQA SADC Task Team has recently prepared a valuable paper analysing the implications and options for development of a harmonised qualifications framework for the SADC region. This was presented at the October 2001 meeting of the SADC Technical Committee in Lesotho. A table in the paper summarises the current state of development of NQFs in the region, as reported to SADC’s Technical Committee in October 2001. Of the ten countries reporting three (Lesotho, Swaziland, Seychelles) had commenced background work, three (Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Botswana) had drafted legislation and put some structures in place, and Namibia and South Africa were in the early phase of implementation. The Parliament of Mauritius has since passed the Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act.⁽³²⁾

Pacific Islands Forum

On the other side of the world another regional body is preparing to establish a regional qualifications framework. In May 2001 as part of their post-Dakar Basic Education Action Plan, Ministers of Education of the 16-nation Pacific Islands Forum agreed to:

“consider the setting up of a regional qualifications framework, covering basic, primary, secondary, TVET and tertiary education, benchmarked against appropriate international standards and qualifications”.⁽³³⁾

In October 2001 the 16 Forum countries sought funds from the UNESCO programme budget for the development of the Pacific Qualifications Authority.

Earlier in the same year the participants at a UNESCO-sponsored Asia-Pacific TVET conference in Adelaide, South Australia made “a very strong request for a feasibility study...on the development of a ‘Skills Passport’ [and]...a qualifications framework for the Asia-Pacific Region...which would encourage international cooperation between governments and institutions.” As reported above, the ILO is developing a “model” NQF for the Asia-Pacific region.⁽³⁴⁾

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Caribbean Community

In July 1997 the member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) amended their treaty in order to provide for the removal of barriers to the free movement of persons, services and capital in the region. This amendment, known as Protocol II, is regarded as the most emphatic decision yet taken by the Caribbean leaders to deepen the regional economic integration process. Article 35e provides for the "Acceptance of Diplomas, Certificates and other Evidence of Qualifications". It charges the Council for Human and Social Development to "establish common standards and measures for accreditation or when necessary for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of qualifications of the nationals of the Member States." In pursuance of Protocol II, CARICOM reports that a "Regional Equivalency Qualifications Framework" has been completed and a Regional Accreditation Body is planned.⁽³⁵⁾

In the light of the Protocol, the region's TVET community has taken steps to develop standardised Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs), which "would be the first Caribbean-born and recognized techvoc qualifications". English experience with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Scottish experience with Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and the ILO's experience with competency standards design, are all being harnessed in the effort to reform TVET curricula and establish NQFs as part of the regional framework.⁽³⁶⁾

The regional impulse is also at work in higher education. The CARICOM Standing Committee of Ministers of Education mandated the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) to develop a regional mechanism for accreditation, equivalence and articulation (AEA) of tertiary education qualifications. In 2000 ACTI produced an action-oriented manual, providing guidelines and best practice for establishing and operating a regional framework for AEA, and ACTI will be the regional implementation agency.⁽³⁷⁾

National governments

Mexico

Mexico's national qualifications framework is being developed as part of a comprehensive reform of technical and vocational education linked to macro-economic and fiscal reform. In 1995 Mexico enacted legislation to establish the Council for the Standardisation and Certification of Work Competencies (CONOCER) to re-organise the country's technical and vocational education system in terms of a five-year \$245 million grant from the International Monetary Fund. This initiative was inspired by the British National Vocational Qualifications system and by the Australian experience. CONOCER operates under the direction of the Ministries of Labour and Education. By mid-2001 it was reported to have installed 19 awarding bodies and 98 assessment centres throughout the country, developed more than 400 competency standards and awarded 23, 000 competency certificates. The British Council has been awarded commercial contracts by CONOCER for the provision of information on vocational qualifications from Scotland and England, consultancy expertise and training.⁽³⁸⁾

CONOCER has initiated an international benchmarking exercise with the major experienced national qualifications authorities. The process involves detailed comparison of standards setting processes, assessment, certification and the underpinning quality assurance mechanisms in the different countries. A roundtable meeting with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in London and the United States National Skills Standards Board (NSSB) was followed in 2000 by a conference to which in addition the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB), the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and SAQA were invited.⁽³⁹⁾

These bodies now form the International Benchmarking Group. Following a preliminary descriptive phase of benchmarking reports, the group has moved on to consider how NQFs could be evaluated in terms of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness. The QCA presented a draft set of criteria at a meeting of the group in London in mid-2001. The next meeting is scheduled for Washington D.C. in 2002.

United States

The United States does not have a national qualifications framework, but within its constitutional arrangements it has responded to the same national and international conditions that have given rise to NQFs elsewhere. In the United States the role of the federal government in the field of education and training is largely restricted to influencing state actions by setting national norms and targets and using the power of federal conditional grants. President Clinton's Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994 used novel methods to expand the scope of federal influence on school education and vocational training outcomes by creating a National Education Standards and Improvement Council and a National Skills Standards Board (NSSB). The former lasted two years before being repealed by Congress.⁽⁴⁰⁾

There is nevertheless significant national interest in using standards setting and associated measures to improve education and training quality, in order to increase the accountability of schools to their communities, attack inequality and enhance the country's competitive position in skills, technology and trade. Under President George W. Bush the NSSB has been retained and a new education reform Act has been passed that encourages states to set, measure and achieve higher levels of learner attainment in schools.⁽⁴¹⁾

The NSSB does not create or impose national skills standards. It serves as a catalyst for the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skills standards and certification within 15 occupational clusters "to enhance the ability of the United States to compete effectively in a global economy". The standards are based on high performance work and designed to be portable across sectors. The Board is empowered to endorse the standards developed in each cluster and to recognise other qualifications that meet NSSB certification recognition criteria. The voluntary character of the system is intended to ensure that it is "customer-driven".⁽⁴²⁾

Stakeholder participation is fundamental to the NSSB process of skills standards development and approval. The Board itself comprises 27 members nominated respectively by the President and the political leadership of the Congress to represent industry, labour, education, and defined communities, and significantly also includes the Secretaries of Education, Labour and Commerce (not their nominees). The chairperson of the National Education Standards and Improvement Council had been a member of the NSSB until the Council was abolished.

The NSSB process of voluntary national skills standards development has been thorough but not rapid or comprehensive. Since the Act was passed in 1994, out of 15 clusters, skills standards have been developed in the manufacturing and the sales and service industry sectors. Development is under way in the education and training and hospitality and tourism industry sectors. "Coalition-building" – that is, the building of stakeholder formations – is continuing in the utilities and IT/telecommunications sectors.⁽⁴³⁾

Canada

In Canada both education and skills development are provincial responsibilities. In the absence of a federal department of education, inter-provincial liaison and joint action is co-ordinated by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), which has a small professional secretariat. The ministers have affirmed their responsibility to provide leadership at the pan-Canadian level through the CMEC. They recognise the need for joint action based on a common statement of values and beliefs, and endorse co-operation with their counterparts in the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM). In the period 2000-2005 CMEC will focus on a number of priority areas, including educational outcomes, curriculum collaboration, mobility and sharing information on best practice.⁽⁴⁴⁾

In responding to the challenges posed by contemporary economic, social and technological changes, Canada's provinces and territories are expected to balance "the need to impose common standards and mechanisms of accountability" against a variety of countervailing forces. These include cultural diversity, professional responsibility, academic freedom, and the needs of local communities. Although Canada has no national qualifications framework, several co-operative initiatives by provincial and territorial education and training authorities try to achieve "the synergy resulting from the simultaneous common search for accountability, quality, and balance".⁽⁴⁵⁾

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Provincial and territorial departments of education launched a national School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) through the CMEC, to assess the achievement level of 13- and 16-year olds in mathematics, problem solving, reading and writing, and science. All provinces and territories established their own testing programmes. Canada-wide assessments have been conducted in mathematics (1993) and reading and writing skills (1994), and all jurisdictions except Quebec are currently preparing a common framework for learning achievement in science for grades K-12. The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) has urged CMEC to broaden the SAIP to include generic indicators for skills, values and ethics.⁽⁴⁶⁾

The Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) and a federal department, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), undertake a variety of initiatives to encourage and facilitate skills development in terms of the federal government's "national action plan on skills and learning for the 21st century". One of the objectives of FLMM is "to promote a highly skilled workforce with portable qualifications through the development and expansion of interprovincial standards".⁽⁴⁷⁾

In the Labour Mobility chapter of the *Agreement on Internal Trade*, which came into effect in 1995, all provinces and territories committed themselves to the principles of mutual recognition of qualifications and reconciliation of labour market standards. In a subsequent agreement, *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians*, signatory governments committed themselves to full compliance with this goal by 1 July 2001. The governments focussed on 51 occupations that were either self-regulated through their own professional bodies or regulated by governments, such as architects, engineers, teachers and nurses. In December 2001, FLMM announced that 97 per cent of workers in such regulated occupations had benefited by the agreements. 65 trades, such as electrician, plumber and crane operator, are also regulated across provincial jurisdictions. Workers in 44 trades can have their qualifications recognised across the country by completing an apprenticeship and passing an inter-provincial (Red Seal) examination. The Red Seal endorsement can also be achieved through RPL. Governments are working on alternative recognition arrangements for other trades, based on aligning occupational standards and apprenticeship requirements.⁽⁴⁸⁾

HRDC has mounted "sectoral partnerships initiatives" to improve learning and support labour mobility in private sector employment. It sponsors and financially supports 26 Sector Councils covering about 35 per cent of the current labour force. These are formal but voluntary coalitions typically comprising managers, labour representatives, owner operators, educators and government officials. They address HRD needs in their sectors, including quality standards, with a view to enabling Canadian industries to respond flexibly to change and become more competitive in international markets. HRDC has produced a checklist on the occupational standards development process to assist Sector Councils, occupational groups and national associations to develop voluntary national standards in their sectors and occupational areas. HRDC emphasises the indicative status of this document, and the voluntary character of national skills standards, bearing in mind provincial responsibility for labour market training. However, HRDC regards Sector Councils as "national institutions with national values" that have an important role in the new national Skills and Learning agenda.⁽⁴⁹⁾

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's national qualifications frameworks have developed progressively over two decades, starting in 1983 with the adoption of the 16+ Action Plan in Scotland, which introduced a single, outcomes-based, modular system of national vocational qualifications below higher education. NQFs in the UK were not created by grand design, but are evolving out of successive reforms in vocational, technical, general and higher education in Scotland on the one hand and England, Wales and Northern Ireland on the other. While the reforms have addressed specific problems in different sectors of education and training, cumulatively they have generated widespread support for integrated and articulated qualifications frameworks and for outcomes-based, unitised (or modular) qualifications. Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) has gained favour as a way of promoting transparency and portability of qualifications.⁽⁵⁰⁾

The four-nation make-up of the United Kingdom is reflected in its institutional structure and increasingly in its qualifications policy processes. Four “non-departmental public bodies” have been set up to regulate the new qualifications frameworks for education and training in schools, colleges and workplaces below degree level. In 1997 the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) was created in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1996. The Education Act, 1997 established the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for England and empowered the government to establish the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Council (ACCAC) for Wales, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for Northern Ireland.

Also in 1997 a fifth body, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), was established with government approval as an independent charitable company. Its countrywide mandate includes the development and maintenance of the NQF for higher education.⁽⁵¹⁾

The respective responsibilities of these five bodies are very wide, indicating that the maintenance of qualifications frameworks is embedded in the broader tasks of curriculum and assessment reform and review:

- The SQA “is the national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment, and certification of qualifications other than degrees”. It approves education and training providers’ suitability for entering people for SQA qualifications and quality assures such providers. It is also engaged in a radical reform of the upper secondary school curriculum called “Higher Still”. This combines academic and vocational qualifications in a single curriculum and assessment framework using a unit standards approach.⁽⁵²⁾
- The QCA’s mission is to be “a guardian of standards in education and training”. Its role is to maintain and develop the curriculum and its assessment, maintain and develop a coherent framework of general, vocational and occupational qualifications, and set criteria for world-class occupational standards. QCA works mainly in England, but also accredits National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Wales and Northern Ireland.⁽⁵³⁾
- ACCAC is the National Assembly for Wales’s principal advisory body on all aspects of the school curriculum, examinations, assessment and general and vocational qualifications.⁽⁵⁴⁾
- CCEA has similar functions to ACCAC, but provides its advice on “what is taught in schools and colleges...and how it is assessed” to the Northern Ireland Department of Education.⁽⁵⁵⁾
- QAA’s main business is to review and report publicly upon the performance of higher education institutions in respect of quality and standards. It works with the higher education institutions to develop the qualifications framework and the promotion of quality, advises government on whether institutions should be granted degree awarding powers and the university title, and manages the scheme for recognition of access to higher education courses.⁽⁵⁶⁾

The structure and current status of national qualifications frameworks in the United Kingdom is best understood as follows:

- For young people and adults in schools, colleges and workplace training there is a “clear, coherent and inclusive” national qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland covering levels of learning between compulsory education and higher education, managed by QCA in collaboration with ACCAC and CCEA. It contains three categories of qualifications: general (school exit level), occupational, and vocationally related (which lies between the first two categories). The QCA favours unitisation, and has been evaluating alternative ways of establishing a credit-based system, in liaison with ACCAC, CCEA and SQA.⁽⁵⁷⁾
- A national qualifications framework for higher education is being developed by QAA for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, for implementation from the start of the academic year 2003-04.⁽⁵⁸⁾
- However, in Wales the national government is committed to establishing a Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales (CQFW), “a coherent structure for qualifications spanning all post-14 education and training, including higher education.” This would significantly expand the present NQF structure both downwards and upwards, based on a fully inclusive system of credit accumulation, with the aim of radically advancing the Welsh government’s goal of a learning society. CQFW is working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) on a UK Credit Equivalence Project.⁽⁵⁹⁾

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- The Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning is funding NICATS for three years in the first instance (1999 to 2002) to develop a model that will allow small blocks of learning, however acquired, to be assessed and given credit, so that learners can build credits toward a qualification. The Northern Ireland government wants the NICATS credit framework to be in place by September 2002.⁽⁶⁰⁾
- The process of integrating qualifications in a single national framework has been taken furthest in Scotland. In late 2001 the Scottish Executive launched a comprehensive, integrated Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) that “encompasses qualifications across all sectors of education and training” and includes “all major qualifications from schools, colleges, workplaces and universities”. It is expected to “help raise skills in the workplace, develop opportunities for all to participate in lifelong learning and to maximise opportunities for appropriate credit to be given to all types of learning and achievement.” The SCQF’s sponsors hailed it as unique within the UK and a leader internationally. The new framework is a joint product of the SQA, the QAA (Scottish office) and Universities Scotland, supported by the Scottish Executive (Department of Education and Department of Enterprise and Lifelong Learning). The same partnership will develop and manage the framework. The implementation date of the higher education component is expected to be the start of the 2003-04 academic year.⁽⁶¹⁾

The United Kingdom’s network of National Training Organisations (NTOs) is to be abolished and replaced. These employer-led but government recognised and financed bodies have been responsible for sector skills and training plans, developing occupational standards and advising on the national qualifications structure. According to independent reviews undertaken for the government, most have under-performed, being under-resourced, lacking capacity and credibility.

The UK Department of Education and Skills, in partnership with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, has developed a new policy and will establish a new public body, the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), to fund and support a smaller network of new Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). SSCs will be “employer-led and actively involve trade unions, professional bodies and other stakeholders in the sector”. They will cover the key areas in the private and public sectors, and will be expected to tackle sector skills and productivity needs. Each licensed SSC will receive up to £1 million annually in government funds and will be expected to leverage other funds within their sectors. The SSDA leadership is to be appointed and the first “trailblazer” SSCs licensed in February 2002.⁽⁶²⁾

Ireland

It is widely acknowledged that the achievement of high economic growth levels, full employment and rising prosperity among the Irish people in the 1980s and 90s was strongly influenced by the reform and expansion of the education and training system and high investment in technology and technical education and training. The number of potential pathways and ladders linking qualifications had been increasing through the work of the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) and the Irish Certification Authority. The government and tertiary institutions had co-ordinated the development of modular course structures and credit transfer arrangements. By 1998 the Irish government decided to put in place a national qualifications framework in order to provide “a single national basis for co-ordinating and comparing all education and training awards”.

The Irish NQF is intended to address three needs:

- Learners require coherence in the relationships among qualifications and between qualifications and career paths.
- The education and training sector needs a more explicit and effective framework for partnership with industry, business and the wider community.
- Providers and awards bodies need policy direction and clear specifications of standards of learner achievement.⁽⁶³⁾

After investigating the emerging international models of national qualifications frameworks, including South Africa's, the Irish government formulated one of its own. The new Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 established three independent statutory bodies: the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI, appointed in February 2001), the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. Each has separate roles, but the objects of the Act can only be attained by co-operation between them, and full involvement by government departments, the social partners, provider institutions and stakeholder bodies. NQAI is clearly the senior partner among the three statutory bodies. The awards councils must implement recommendations of the Authority relating to their performance.⁽⁶⁴⁾

NQAI is responsible for establishing and maintaining the NQF "based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners". It must promote the maintenance and improvement of the standards of awards in the further and higher education and training sectors, other than in the existing universities, and facilitate access, transfer and progression throughout the system. Its first task is to establish the policies and criteria on which the qualifications framework will be based. The new Authority has published a discussion document to aid that process, recommending seven founding principles to underpin the framework: transparency, simplicity, quality, equality, relevance, comprehensiveness and flexibility.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Universities retain standards setting and award-making powers in terms of previous legislation. Their responsibility to undertake review and quality assurance procedures in co-operation with the Higher Education Authority, a statutory body, has not been disturbed by the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, but the Act obliges the Higher Education Authority to consult with NQAI in performing such functions. The Act also requires universities to co-operate with NQAI in the performance of its own functions and gives them the option of having their qualifications validated by either of the new Awards Councils. NQAI envisages that, after consultation, all university awards will be included in the new NQF, but that the Authority will not have a direct standards setting or quality assurance review role in relation to university awards.⁽⁶⁶⁾

NQAI is concerned to ensure mobility of learners and workers between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, and has already begun to work closely with its partners in Northern Ireland to ensure that the development of the respective NQFs contributes toward that goal.⁽⁶⁷⁾

New Zealand

The New Zealand NQF is a product of a radical reform of government in the period 1984-87 and targeted reform of education governance and administration (1987-91). Both reforms were driven by a new managerial theory of government, which held that "administration is best served through deregulated decision-making as close as possible to the action". In economic management this meant the reduction of state intervention and the dismantling of controls. In the public service it meant separating policy advice from the delivery of services and making service providers accountable through performance contracts. In education it meant dissolving the Department of Education and local Education Boards, creating a leaner Ministry of Education and shifting governing and managerial responsibility to the community and institutional levels, with accountability to the centre.⁽⁶⁸⁾

Reforms of schools, early childhood education and tertiary education gave expression to the new approach. Among other matters the tertiary education review addressed the unsatisfactory connections between schools, tertiary education and employment, and proposed the creation of a New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). NZQA was established in terms of the Education Act, 1989, as a crown entity (statutory body) with a board appointed by the Minister of Education, accountable through the Minister to Parliament. It was charged with developing a framework of secondary and post-school qualifications, overseeing the setting of standards for those qualifications, and administering national secondary qualifications and some (non-university) tertiary ones. NZQA commenced operations on 1 January 1991. NZQA's operations were to be funded through the purchase of services by the Ministry of Education. At the same time an Education Review Office was created to evaluate and report on education in all schools, all early childhood centres, and all other forms of pre-tertiary education in New Zealand.⁽⁶⁹⁾

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The impulse to reform was maintained under a new government, which promoted the NQF as a “seamless” qualifications structure that would help break down the barriers between different types and levels of learning provision. Supervision of training functions was moved from the Department of Labour to the Ministry of Education under the Education and Training Support Agency (now Skill New Zealand). The Ministry of Education bound workplace training into the NQF through a new Industry Training Act, 1992. The Act provides for recognition of employer-led Industry Training Organisations (ITOs). The Board of the Agency (now Skill New Zealand) is empowered to enter into agreements with ITOs (after consulting with NZQA) for the setting of skill standards registered by NZQA, and the administration of industry training in workplaces or elsewhere. All industry training leads to credit and qualifications on the NQF.⁽⁷⁰⁾

NZQA's National Qualifications Services (NQS) is responsible for all unit standards and national qualifications that are not the responsibility of ITOs, the National Standards Body Māori or the Ministry of Education. This amounts to about half of all unit standards (including generic standards) and one-eighth of the qualifications on the Framework. NQS liaises with over 80 advisory networks. Such bodies were co-ordinated by National Standards Bodies, but (except for the Māori NSB) NSBs were disbanded in 2000 on the grounds that the Authority was not empowered to delegate its standards setting and assessment moderation responsibility for non-ITO Framework qualifications.⁽⁷¹⁾

In the first years of the NZQA, standards setting was *laissez faire*. This was corrected by state funding for a labour market training programme offering second-chance education in particular generic skill areas at levels 1 and 2. When ITOs started up they were restricted to levels 1-4. NZQA's government funding for standards setting is not restricted by level but the Authority has given priority to levels 1-5.

The university community and parts of the school community sharply contested NZQA's insistence on unit standards-based qualifications and particular specifications of unit standards and assessment. NZQA based its argument on the right of learners to know the criteria by which their learning was to be assessed (the transparency principle), and the right of learners and workers to build qualifications on the basis of credits for units of learning achieved, regardless of context (the access, articulation and portability principles). Critics countered with the claim that schools and universities need to award whole qualifications that reflect a just assessment of the outcome of the entirety of the learning process in their institutions. In this view qualifications based exclusively on combinations of unit standards cannot fully reflect the qualities of learning which are valued in school and university education. On such grounds the universities resisted incorporation of their qualifications in the NQF, though their resistance had a broader basis in their opposition to governments' funding regime for the sector.⁽⁷²⁾

The issues were debated over a protracted period as governments contemplated the future direction of education reform. An Inter-institutional Bodies Consultative Group was created and worked intensively to find common ground on which to erect an expanded framework capable of housing all approved national qualifications. The upshot was an agreement, formalised early in 2001, to develop the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (to be known as “the Register”) whose purposes are:

- to clearly identify all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand;
- to ensure that all qualifications have a purpose and relation to each other that students and the public can understand;
- to maintain and enhance learners' ability to transfer credit by the establishment of a common system of credit; and
- to enhance and build on the international recognition of New Zealand Qualifications.

The Register is a comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand, each of which is described in terms of its “quality characteristics”. All qualifications that are quality assured by a recognised “approval and accreditation body” will automatically be included in the register. The Register has ten levels, starting with certificates at level 1 (including the new National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), based on “achievement standards”, for learners aged 16-19) and ending with doctoral degrees at level 10. The Register includes a statement of level descriptors.

All qualifications on the Register bear the designations “National” or “New Zealand”. “National qualifications” are based on unit or achievement standards, or have automatically transferable credit. “New Zealand qualifications” are any other quality assured qualifications. All national qualifications quality assured by NZQA, including the NCEA, are a “subset” of the Register.

For each qualification there must be a statement of learning outcomes, including “what the whole qualification represents in terms of the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes”. The statement must also include information on the components of the qualification “which, in their wholeness, make up the qualification”. Only the outcome statements of the whole qualification are required to be on the Register. They need not be expressed in a standardised format, but must satisfy criteria of transparency and specificity, and must aid the determination of equivalencies. Courses and parts of qualifications must have publicly-available outcome statements.⁽⁷³⁾

By law, only two bodies have responsibility for the oversight of quality assurance, NZQA and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committee (NZVCC). However, NZQA may delegate its QA function. It has conferred such delegations on specialised units of the Association of Polytechnics of New Zealand and the Association of Colleges of Education in New Zealand respectively. In 1999 the government contemplated establishing an over-arching Quality Assurance Authority of New Zealand (QAANZ) that would have assumed the Authority’s policy and quality oversight roles including the development of the NQF. This proposal would have drastically altered the role and functions of NZQA, and it was abandoned the following year.⁽⁷⁴⁾

The impetus of New Zealand education reform continues. After two years’ work by the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, the government introduced a Tertiary Education Reform Bill at the end of 2001. When enacted this will set up a new crown entity, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), to oversee all tertiary education and training. The TEC is intended to integrate the sector and provide strategic leadership to meet the needs of learners and employers for the knowledge society. The new Commission will take over Skill New Zealand and the tertiary education operations of the Ministry of Education. It will thus have responsibility for “all learning in all quality-assured environments beyond the school system,” including universities, polytechnics, Māori wananga, colleges of education, adult education, registered private training establishments, and ITOs. The Bill intends to strengthen quality assurance by giving NZQA powers of early intervention in respect of the providers for which it has QA responsibility.⁽⁷⁵⁾

The New Zealand government regards this as an important milestone:

“Eleven years ago, the Fourth Labour Government introduced the National Qualifications Framework and put New Zealand in the forefront of an integrated approach to lifelong learning. Over the last decade many countries have begun to follow New Zealand’s lead. The establishment of the Commission takes New Zealand’s integrated approach to the next level, and once again provides the lead for other nations to follow.”⁽⁷⁶⁾

Australia

The regulatory responsibility for vocational education and training in Australia’s strong federal system resides with the states and territories. Successive reforms in the vocational education and training system have resulted in a substantial increase in co-ordinated action by the states and territories under Commonwealth (federal) leadership. The inauguration of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a manifestation of these trends. A similar impulse toward national policies for higher education, and strong political and stakeholder endorsement of a national mission for all education and training in a globalising world, have recently led to the inclusion of higher education qualifications in the AQF.

In the 1970s, Australian education was strongly influenced by UNESCO’s newly-coined concept of “lifelong education” and the OECD’s promotion of “recurrent education”. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) was created as a new national sector of education based on the transformation of state technical colleges into TAFE colleges with a mission of social and individual development. By the mid-1980s, economic slowdown, the decline

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of the mining, agricultural and manufacturing industries, the rise of service industries and high unemployment levels all contributed to government disenchantment with the prevailing ideas underlying Australian education policies. In 1987, the Ministry of Employment, Education and Training was established “with a clear preference for vocational and instrumental goals over the objectives of social and individual development which had been the hallmark of policies based on recurrent and lifelong learning.” Australia (in common with other Anglophone member countries of the OECD) adopted a distinctive approach to competency based training that diverged from European approaches to technical and vocational education.⁽⁷⁷⁾

The government’s switch in emphasis from a public provider-led system to an industry-led system was reflected in the July 1992 agreement by Australian heads of government to establish a new authority to advise state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers on vocational education and training. The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Act, 1992 brought the authority into being. It reports to the ANTA Ministerial Council (ANTA MINCO) but is overseen by the ANTA Board, which is comprised almost entirely of industry representatives and has significant powers to set the agenda and determine funding to states and territories. ANTA is charged with developing and implementing a co-operative national VET system characterised by close interaction between industry and providers, an effective training market, an efficient network of publicly funded providers, expanded intake and improved outcomes, and improved cross-sectoral links between schools, higher education and VET.⁽⁷⁸⁾

ANTA funds 23 national Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs), which are the link between employers and the VET system. ITABs comprise employer, employee and VET representatives. They plan the implementation of VET relevant to their industry’s needs and play an important role in the development of competency standards and curriculum. State ITABs reflect the respective state’s industry profile. ANTA’s Standards and Curriculum Council oversees the standards setting process.⁽⁷⁹⁾

In June 1993, the Council of Australian Governments brought education and training policy making together in a new Ministerial Council of Ministers on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which necessarily works in close conjunction with ANTA MINCO.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The development of the Australian Qualifications Framework was undertaken under instruction from MCEETYA by a working party comprising representatives from the schools, VET and higher education sectors, the Commonwealth government and industry partners. MCEETYA established the AQF Advisory Board (AQFAB) in 1995 “to protect the AQF qualifications guidelines and to promote and monitor national implementation of the AQF.” AQFAB reports directly to MCEETYA. Its 11 members comprise an independent chair of high standing, representatives of the higher education, schools and VET sectors, the curriculum authorities, organised labour, organised business, equity groups (currently Adult Learning Australia, Inc.), and the Commonwealth Government. Its membership must be balanced in terms of gender, expertise in accreditation and knowledge of education and training systems.⁽⁸¹⁾

AQFAB has no executive role. It is essentially a watchdog, a liaison body, a facilitator, a centre of national and international intelligence, and an advisor to MCEETYA and any other interested party. It must monitor the AQF “to ensure that it supports a national commitment to quality education and lifelong learning”. The Advisory Board operates as “as high-level cross-sectoral forum...for negotiation and re-thinking about qualifications” and in doing so it must liaise closely with all statutory authorities responsible for education, training and accreditation, whose roles it complements. AQFAB is furnished with a secretariat of two, an Executive Officer and a Senior Project Officer, and a small budget for research and consultancy support.⁽⁸²⁾

The Framework was introduced Australia-wide on 1 January 1995 and phased in over five years, with full implementation planned for 2000. In fact, the AQF continues to be developed and improved. For instance, revised guidelines for higher education qualifications were published in 2001 after extensive consultation and approval by MCEETYA.⁽⁸³⁾

The AQF is variously described as:

- “a transparent and coherent system of national qualifications owned and endorsed by Australian education ministers represented on [MCEETYA]”;
- “a comprehensive, nationally consistent yet flexible framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training”; and
- “a highly visible, quality-assured national system of educational recognition which promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system”.⁽⁸⁴⁾

The Framework comprises twelve qualifications, from the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education through to the doctoral degree. They are grouped in three sectors, schools, VET and HE “according to the sector in which they are most commonly used”. However, vocational competencies are increasingly reflected in the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education, and some HE qualifications are being offered in the VET sector and *vice versa*. The AQF recognises that the three sectors have different industry and institutional linkages. There are

“no standardised rankings or equivalences between different qualifications issued in different sectors, as these qualifications reflect different types of learning reflecting the distinctive educational responsibilities of each sector. Where the same qualifications are issued in more than one sector but authorised differently by each sector (ie Diploma, Advanced Diploma) they are equivalent qualifications, although sector-differentiated.”⁽⁸⁵⁾

The Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) has recently issued policy guidelines on “cross-sector qualification linkages”, in support of “closer connections between VET and HE...a more open, accessible and relevant tertiary education system and a vehicle for implementing lifelong learning”.⁽⁸⁶⁾

The quality assurance of the training and HE systems has received substantial attention. The foundation of the QA system is the public Registers established by the AQF Board at the direction of MCEETYA. One is a register of self-accrediting institutions and approved accreditation agencies (mainly universities and state accrediting bodies). The other is a register of bodies with authority to issue qualifications. These are non-self-accrediting institutions that have been approved to issue courses accredited by government agencies.⁽⁸⁷⁾

There is now a National Training Framework comprising two elements, “Training Packages”, and the “Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)”. Training packages are designed to ensure consistency in the delivery of training. In addition to the competency standards themselves, a training package may include learning materials, learning strategies, trainer guides, professional development materials for trainers and assessment guidelines. The AQTF, formally known as the Australian Recognition Framework, is a set of nationally agreed standards to ensure the quality of VET throughout Australia. There are two sets of AQTF standards. One is to be applied by states and territories in registering or auditing training organisations to deliver training, assess competency and issue AQF qualifications. The other is the standards to be met by state and territory registering and course accrediting bodies. In terms of these AQTF standards, a training organisation registered in one state is registered in all.⁽⁸⁸⁾

In 1999, the Australian federal cabinet approved new quality assurance processes for all higher education institution, designed by a joint task team of state and Commonwealth officials. The new processes respond to the pressures of rapid growth in the sector, the influence of ICT, the internationalisation of the higher education enterprise, and the example of the worldwide quality movement. The existing system of QA was criticised for concentrating on inputs at the expense of outcomes, having no external review of quality assurance processes or standards, providing no basis for comparability among institutions at home or abroad, and lack of coherence in accreditation procedures.

The new system is in two parts: states and territories will accredit non-self-accrediting institutions, co-ordinated nationally by MCEETYA. Both the state and territory bodies and self-accrediting institutions will be subject to an external audit by the new Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), a body established by MCEETYA but operating at arm’s length from government. The autonomy of universities will be respected. The five-yearly audit will be based on a detailed self-assessment by the institution, including comparisons of standards, in order to verify the claims made by institutions about the quality of their learning and research outcomes and management.⁽⁸⁹⁾

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Namibia

In 1994 the Namibian Cabinet agreed to establish a national qualifications framework. The Namibia Qualifications Authority [NQA] Act was passed in 1996. The first NQA Council took office in July 1998 and the second council was inducted in September 2001. The NQA is thus a year younger than SAQA and there has been close communication between the two bodies from the outset.⁽⁹⁰⁾

The Namibian NQF “is not a re-arrangement of existing qualifications, but implies a transformation of education and training and the recognition of all learning which results from it.” Thus the NQA

“was established with the express mandate to put in place a comprehensive and flexible National Qualifications Framework, which will provide for multiple pathways for Namibians to gain qualifications and to redress the injustices of the past by recognising the competencies of Namibians regardless of where they learnt them”.⁽⁹¹⁾

The objects of the NQA Act cover these matters and more: setting national curriculum standards, promoting occupational benchmarks, accrediting instruction or training, and providing public information on national standards and qualifications.

The NQA Council comprises up to 35 members. It is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the host Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation. It includes the Vice-Chancellor of the University, the Rector of the Polytechnic, up to ten other Permanent Secretaries (or their alternates in each case), and nominees of other state departments and statutory bodies, professional councils, and stakeholder bodies. The Act provides for a full-time Director and staff to be employed by the Authority, but this has not yet transpired. Instead, the affairs of the NQA have been managed by a secretariat in the Ministry.⁽⁹²⁾

At the NQF launch conference in October 1999 it was agreed that the Framework should embrace all learning and all qualifications. The NQA Council adopted an eight-level framework, starting with compulsory schooling at Level 1 and ending with doctorates at Level 8. The Council approved 12 organising fields (identical to SAQA's) and agreed to the establishment of a National Standards Setting Body (NSSB) for each field, with sub-fields and Standards Generating Bodies to be gazetted after consultation and agreement at national level. A provisional policy for standards setting has been adopted.⁽⁹³⁾

In practice the organisation of standards setting has been rather flexible. The NQA's policy states that “the overriding aim is to increase the competitiveness and productivity of the Namibian economy through industry responsive reform of the Education and Training system”. Thus the development of national standards “sits firmly as a responsibility of the industry or occupation”. A variety of organisations may be designated as NSSBs, including Industry Training Boards, professional institutions, non-statutory training bodies, or consortia of cross-sectoral interests. Each NSSB must include representatives from at least the following interest groups: employers, employees, education and training providers, professional bodies and the government. The actual standards setting in a sub-field is done by a specialist working party or panel established or recognised by the NSSB, using experts or consultants from the field. The group is expected to undertake wide consultation with practitioners in its occupational area. Common steps in developing standards are suggested, but the choice of method is left to the occupational group concerned. International comparators are used, and if necessary international standards are taken over and adapted.⁽⁹⁴⁾

By September 2001, the NQA had facilitated national standards setting work in the fishing, water and financial sectors, and SGBs were in prospect in health, tourism, media studies and arts and culture.⁽⁹⁵⁾

The Council adopted an accreditation policy in March 2001. Accreditation “can only take place once national standards are approved for an industry/profession/occupation.” This has slowed down implementation. Nevertheless, the monitoring of foreign private providers has been regarded as urgent, and they have all been required to register with NQA. In August 2000 the Ministers of Higher Education and Basic Education launched an Accreditation Committee for Teacher Training Programmes offered in Namibia to evaluate courses and course materials offered to Namibian students. This committee is a sub-committee of the NQA Council.⁽⁹⁶⁾

At the end of the first Council's term of office acute secretariat staff shortages and inadequate resources were recognised as severe limitations on the capacity of the NQA to fulfil its mandate. The second council was expected to address these matters, ensure the appointment of all NSSB members, undertake a review of the NQA legal and policy framework, decide on "outsourcing of the NQA" and continue work on the harmonisation of levels within the Southern Africa region.⁽⁹⁷⁾

The South African NQF in international perspective

This account makes clear that the establishment of NQFs is an international movement of considerable vigour and increasing range. It is not a universal movement, although world bodies like the ILO and UNESCO are actively involved in assisting it to spread, in particular through sub-regional organs and meetings. Because the NQF concept has been closely identified with competency standards it has not been embraced in countries that prefer to develop their systems of qualifications on the basis of their own, very different traditions. But the massive alterations in the structures of economies and the conditions of working life are compelling such countries to re-examine their own models of education and training. There is evidence of a trend towards greater transparency in reporting on qualifications, acceptance of the value of outcomes statements in making assessment both comprehensible and valid, and recognition of the utility of modular learning and credit accumulation for lifelong learning and both learner and worker mobility. There is a very strong impetus toward achieving international equivalence of qualifications. On the side of the NQF pioneers, flexibility and respect for different approaches toward learning outcomes seems to have won out against the rigid application of a single model for standards and qualifications descriptors.⁽⁹⁸⁾

NQFs may be designed to cover only vocational education and training, or all pre-higher education and training, or only higher education. Some countries have managed two or three frameworks in parallel, for skills development, school education and higher education. A few others have linked all three frameworks by one means or another. South Africa's NQF covers education and training in the General, Further and Higher Education and Training bands under one comprehensive roof.

NQF developments have not been smooth or unproblematic. There are significant costs involved in supporting the standards setting, quality assurance and data management processes involved in NQF development. Nevertheless, the NQF movement is of relatively short duration and there are success stories. Experience across countries is being exchanged. It is to be expected that countries are pursuing similar objectives by different means, and this can be counted as a source of mutual stimulation and innovation. It takes time before results are apparent and expectations have to be managed, especially when the broad objectives of the NQF encompass far more than the design and rolling out of the qualifications framework itself.

South Africa's decision in 1995 to establish the NQF was strategic. It asserted a unifying vision at the moment when the South African people had come together under one Constitution and Parliament. The NQF was designed to play its role in nation-building, reconstruction and development. South Africa became one of the early exponents of purpose-built national qualifications frameworks. The international trend has amply vindicated this decision. Moreover, the development of the South African NQF, led by SAQA, has received significant international recognition. This needs to be borne in mind as the country considers the next phase of development of the Framework.

We turn now to some of the ways in which international experience may illuminate important issues of implementation for South Africa and suggest remedies or alternative approaches. This is a selective list. Other connections with the international experience will be made in the chapters that follow.

Conclusion: points for consideration

Political leadership for NQF development

National qualifications frameworks are not ends in themselves. They are vehicles to achieve broader and deeper improvements in education and training provision, especially widening access, improving mobility, enhancing quality and linking workplace skills development to formal education and training. NQFs are part of the profound

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outcomes-oriented re-shaping of public services that has been under way in advanced and emerging economies for the past two decades. They are also an appropriate response to the demands of an increasingly inter-dependent and yet mutually-competitive international order, easing the flow of students and specialists across domestic and international borders.

These are the considerations that have driven NQF development internationally. The tripartite International Labour Conference's recent endorsement of national qualifications frameworks (and even regional and international qualifications frameworks) is a strong signal by a powerful world forum that NQFs have strategic importance in today's world. The movement, sometimes hesitant, toward convergence of qualifications systems in Europe (and Latin America) is another indication of the significance of the NQF concept. The logic of international inter-dependence is driving many states toward rationalising national qualifications systems, because they see this as a necessary precondition for creating an international qualifications currency.

Such developments have been, and can only be, politically led since they involve important state and public interests. To an impressive extent governments actively shape the strategic direction of NQFs in the countries where NQFs are most advanced. Political leadership of this movement has been most successful when it has been undertaken in the best modern tradition. That is, cross-party political consensus has been achieved, inter-departmental accord has been negotiated, alliances with the social partners (organised business and organised labour) have been forged, respectful consultation and collaboration has been undertaken with the communities of education and training providers, the professional bodies and other stakeholders, government departments and NQF secretariats have given Ministers the benefit of high-quality staff work and advice. Where development has run aground it has tended to be because one or other of these requirements has been unsuccessful, inadequate or ignored.

Successful implementation of the South African NQF will require consistent and flexible political leadership of this kind. It is not that Ministers are required to manage the professional demands of this very complex undertaking. But their understanding of the strategic importance of the NQF to the national Human Resources Development Strategy and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is essential in order to ensure that the NQF – in the broader context of education and skills development provision – is actively on the agenda of government priorities.

This means more than verbal commitment, important as that is. International developments show that the implementation of the core activities of the NQF, namely standards setting and qualifications design, quality assurance, and the maintenance of accessible, comprehensive databases, require an adequate investment of public funds as well as contributions from others, notably employers. The extent of budgetary support will be an indicator of the priority the South African government accords to NQF development.

It is noteworthy that combined ministries of education and training are responsible for the NQF in the Australian, New Zealand and United Kingdom governments. In South Africa two Ministries, Education and Labour, are the joint custodians of the NQF. A combined portfolio is not in itself a guarantee that the two streams of education and training will be managed in perfect harmony and mutual understanding. In fact one stream might be allowed to dominate and downgrade the other in the competition for political attention and resources. But there are particular challenges to be faced and surmounted where two Ministries have joint ownership of a major national programme that touches the essential interests of each. This puts a premium on the quality of political leadership required, and the quality of support the Ministers receive from their senior officials. Inter-departmental collaboration is essential, based on the national interest and a frank acknowledgement of the respective contributions each department makes to the totality of their joint endeavour.

The main international exemplars of NQF development other than South Africa are all OECD member countries with advanced industrial economies, excellent infrastructure and highly developed education and training systems. South Africa is an emerging economy battling to overcome its apartheid legacy, especially the legacy of poverty, unequal educational and training provision, and other low indices of human resource development, including the loss of many skilled and professional workers through HIV/AIDS. These conditions have implications

for the kind of NQF South Africa needs and the manner in which it can best be implemented. Similar considerations apply to the concept of a regional qualifications framework for the SADC region. The examples of the OECD states are of limited help in comprehending these issues. South Africans and their regional neighbours will need to work out their own solutions. This is primarily a capacity issue and suggests the need for careful identification of priorities. This too will require political and professional leadership of a high order.

Debate and contestation

Reform processes associated with the development of NQFs over the past two decades have been characterised by controversy and argument at almost every stage, among stakeholder groups, the respective government or qualifications authority, and different sectors of education and training.

The causes of dispute have included:

- problems arising from lack of capacity or from governments' under-estimation of the resources required for implementation;
- the difficulty of communicating with thousands of stakeholders in a wide range of institutions and agencies;
- the tendency of governments to introduce overlapping and sometimes competing initiatives without determining their precedence or defining priorities for implementation;
- placing undue reliance on qualifications reform as an independent lever of change;
- the tendency for some advocates of outcomes-based education to focus on the apparatus of standards setting to the detriment of institution building, pedagogy and professional capacity;
- the phenomenon of zealotry: enthusiastic advocates taking ideas, whether reasonable or otherwise, to unreasonable extremes, and insisting that there is only one right way;
- inflexible application of rules to very different learning situations, whether in formal institutions or workplaces;
- vested interests, or the tendency for supporters of the idea of an integrated framework nevertheless to put the perceived needs of their sectors and clients first; and
- understandable and predictable struggles between the representatives of different education and training traditions and values, in particular the resistance of higher education communities to adopting a theory and method of qualifications design that they regard as inappropriate and retrogressive.

Many of these causes of dissension and dispute are inter-related. Some are more amenable to correction than others. Political exigencies or legitimate budgetary constraints are rather intractable. Communication must be worked on continuously because it can almost always be done better. Zealotry often self-destructs because it alienates so many essential allies and collaborators, but not before great damage has been done. Putting too many eggs in the basket of qualifications reform may lead to serious disenchantment and frustration when the reform fails to deliver what people expect from it. We discuss this further below.

Because NQFs are so new and have experienced such a rapid and chequered evolution, there has not been time for an orthodoxy to develop. This has not prevented some NQF activists here and abroad from espousing fixed positions. Dogmatism is particularly inappropriate when applied to a subject as new and dynamic as a national qualifications framework, especially given the variety of national conditions in which NQFs are developing. Zealotry and dogmatism are unpleasant manifestations that are more likely to turn allies into enemies than to win converts to the cause. It has no place in a reform of learning systems. There is a distinction between committed advocacy for properly agreed positions on fundamentals, and unreasonable insistence on one single approach to less important or even unimportant matters.

Contestation is an inevitable (and in many respects healthy) feature of complex reform programmes. It does not necessarily mean that a programme is going off the rails. In particular, struggles between sectors in defence of particular learning traditions may be essential to find the appropriate common ground and achieve acceptance and willing support. Likewise, compromise in defence of an important principle like integration must be counted a virtue. After all, no major system change can possibly succeed on the basis that its authors have been correct first time and all along.

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The state sponsors and professional advocates of qualifications reform should not assume that all opposition and resistance is based on blind conservatism or reaction. Developing and implementing an NQF raises deep questions relating to the nature of knowledge and pedagogy in the circumstances of a particular society. People in authority do their cause a disservice if they adopt a dismissive attitude to legitimate demands that such issues be properly investigated and thought through.

Building communities of trust

While qualifications systems based on learning outcomes are making headway around the world, it is important to acknowledge that there is much to admire in another reputable qualifications tradition which is process- or institution-based. The Danish and German dual system is the best-known exemplar of this tradition, which is common elsewhere in Europe and other countries. It is not static, but adapting to the same objective conditions as the NQF countries are doing, though from a different starting point: the trust established over time within professional and other occupational communities as well as between educational institutions and employers.

The strength of this approach is that qualifications are seen as an organic part of the whole education and training system. The learning outcomes that qualifications certify are taken as one element in a process that relies also on trust and shared practice that is deeply rooted in tradition and past experience. For these reasons the approach is slow to change and is not easily exportable. It relies on strong state intervention and regulation, strong institutions and distinctive partnerships between institutions, employers and unions. South African institutions like the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), technikons and technical colleges may be developing some of these characteristics. But the interest of the model for South Africa lies less in its exportability than in the notion of “communities of trust” and the importance of strengthening institutions and professional capacities, which may be indispensable for qualifications reform.⁽⁹⁹⁾

The success of a qualifications framework may be measured by the extent to which its standards and qualifications are valued and used. Unless capable providers offer them, and unless committed employers understand and demand them, standards and qualifications *per se* will be inert and disregarded. Thus a qualifications framework cannot stand on its own but needs to be embedded in both the provider community and the communities of users. Trust, which is closely allied to credibility and acceptance, is an essential attribute of successful qualifications anywhere, whether conventional or otherwise. If outcomes-based qualifications are too far removed from the contexts where learning is done or where qualifications are put to use they will be rejected or ignored.

Qualifications are the currency of education and training, not its core business which is learning. Likewise standards do not substitute for curriculum and assessment but should serve as a guide to developing both learning programmes and the professional capacities of teachers and trainers. Thus strengthening the institutional base or workplace environments of learning is a necessary underpinning for qualifications, whose value cannot rely on standards alone. Moreover, if the NQF goals of learner progression and the transferability of credits are to make headway, connections between qualifications will need to be sustained by communities of trust forged among institutions and stakeholders including employers, professional bodies and employee organisations.

Recognising the differences between sectors

Outcomes-based standards and qualifications can work successfully in all sectors of education and training provided that the differences between the sectors are recognised and accepted.

Internationally, this lesson has been long in the learning. Working out how to implement OBE has been a tortuous experience in all countries where it has been attempted. In particular, outcomes-based qualifications have suffered from over-specified and over-prescriptive outcomes and standards and from misguided attempts to impose uniformity. Efforts to pin down quite elusive standards through ever more elaborate performance criteria and statements of evidence requirements often became both unintelligible and self-defeating because the intended outcomes were distorted in the process.

In the countries with the longest history of outcomes-based approaches, it is increasingly accepted that the form in which outcomes and standards is expressed will vary across subjects and fields of education and training. Where unit standards work best it is because the different needs of different education and training sectors are respected.

There is absolutely no reason why schools and universities should be required to re-format all their qualifications in units, and there is every reason not to insist on unitisation if by so doing the character and quality of the learning and assessment processes are impaired. On the other hand, it makes sense for schools and universities to adopt a unit approach to qualifications design, or to offer unit standards independent of qualifications, if the learning area or learners' needs will be better served by doing so. The approach must be flexible and allow scope for institutions' distinctiveness.

Working with the grain of a learning community, acknowledging and trusting the best of that tradition, is a productive approach to reform. Adopting a respectful engagement with the different needs of schools, universities and workplace-based training, need not be regarded as a concession but rather embraced as a principle in the development of national qualifications frameworks. Achieving such an understanding, even imperfectly, has been the saving grace of the NQFs in the United Kingdom (particularly Scotland), New Zealand and Australia, which have become comprehensive by admitting and creatively adapting to such differences. It needs to be worked for and achieved in South Africa.

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- (91) *NQA Report*, p. 2; Republic of Namibia, "A Decade of Peace, Democracy and Prosperity 1990-2000," at http://www.op.gov.na/Decade_Peace/h_edu; "Address of the Rt Hon. Hage Geingob - Prime Minister of Namibia on the Occasion of the Opening of the National Conference on Namibia's National Qualifications Framework," Windhoek, 12 October 1999, at <http://www.opm.gov.na/pm/speeches/speech59.htm>.
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- (93) *NQA Report*, pp. 2, 9, 10; NQA, *Provisional Policy on the Setting of Standards for Qualifications in Namibia* (Reprint - October 2000) (Windhoek, [2000]).
- (94) NQA, *Provisional Policy on the Setting of Standards*, pp. 4, 8; [Windhoek Vocational Training Centre (WVTC)], Interview with Mr Frans Gertze, Acting Higher Education Officer responsible for the NQA, in *WVTC Newsletter* (June 2000), p. 2, at <http://www.natron.net/wvtc/news/0001/page02.html>.
- (95) *NQA Report*, pp. 9-11.
- (96) NQA, *Accreditation Policy* (Windhoek, March 2001), p. 2; *NQA Report*, p. 13.
- (97) *NQA Report*, p. 13.
- (98) According to the European Training Foundation, "The shift is moving away from input based systems towards systems describing the outcomes (in Germany e.g. the traditional *Ausbildungsordnungen* are being replaced with *Berufskonzepten*)", at www.etf.eu.int/etfweb.nsf/pages/. See also Volker Ihde, "The Dual System of Vocational Education in Germany - Basic Assets of the System and Its Adaptation to the Challenges of the 21st Century," China Educational Association for International Exchange, at <http://www.ceaie.edu.cn/whatsnew/e518ihde.htm>; Roland Osterlund, "The Danish Model-Quality through dialogue," at <http://www.ceaie.edu.cn/whatsnew/e518osterlund.htm>; [Norway] Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. "The Competence Reform in Norway: Status October 2000," at <http://www.odin.dep.no/kuf/engelsk/education/competence-reform/>.
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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The previous two chapters summarised international developments and submissions received by the Study Team. We have examined the issues raised in these chapters in the light of the current status of the NQF, which was described in chapter 2. We found much insight in the analysis of problems and the suggestions made to us by the two national departments, the statutory bodies and the stakeholder organisations. We were impressed by the unanimous expressions of commitment to the objectives of the NQF and the deep consideration that has been given to its rapid implementation. This indicates that the sense of collective ownership of the NQF is very strong, which is an excellent basis on which to build.

On the other hand, it is unrealistic to place one's hopes in the NQF as a magic bullet for the ills of the education and training system. Whatever solutions are adopted to speed up implementation, the reconstruction and development of South African education and training will require a long march involving all players in the system, the social partners and the national and provincial governments.

To help us clarify the main obstacles in the way of implementing the NQF, and to chart a direction for our proposals, we have distilled seven guiding principles from the many issues raised in chapters 2-4. The principles are a bridge between Part 1 of the report and Part 2, where our proposals are more specific.

Guiding principles

1. The NQF is a major vehicle – but not the only one – for the transformation of education and training

The NQF is a major vehicle of transformation, not the only vehicle. It has been and will be indispensable to many aspects of the transformation process, but not all. The objectives of the NQF do not belong exclusively to the NQF. SAQA is a leader in transformation, but it is neither the sole leader nor the prime leader.

These distinctions are exceptionally important, for the future of the NQF and for SAQA. They help clarify what the NQF is and can be expected to do; what SAQA is responsible for and what it is not.

All the principal legislation on education and training since 1994 acknowledges the centrality of the NQF, and SAQA's role, with respect to standards, qualifications and quality assurance, as well as the broad objectives of access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development. It is entirely fitting, therefore, that the Ministers of Labour and Education should refer to the NQF as "pivotal" to the national human resources development strategy.⁽¹⁾

SAQA is required to perform its role in such a manner that the objectives of the NQF are achieved. There are five objectives. The first is "to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements". This is a tangible objective, an obvious outcome of the NQF, for which only SAQA in collaboration with its partners has legal responsibility, and it is well on the way to being realised. The other four objectives envisage the NQF contributing to processes that are central to the agenda of democratic change in education and training, by

- facilitating access, mobility and progression in education, training and career paths;
- enhancing the quality of education and training;
- accelerating redress in learning and employment opportunities; and
- contributing to full personal development and national social and economic development.

The government intends the NQF to make a major impact on all of these, but the goals themselves – access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development – are wider and deeper than the NQF. They describe the major part of the permanent combined education and training agendas of the Ministries of Education and Labour, and require a range of other actions, including appropriate laws and policies, institutions, budgetary allocations, infrastructure development, professional development for teachers and trainers, and provision of learning resource materials.

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In speech and writing the NQF is often given different meanings:

- the approved unit standards and qualifications, level descriptors and quality assurance guidelines that make up the Framework;
- all the activities of SAQA and its sub-structures;
- the activities of the whole range of partners, stakeholders and providers involved in the development and delivery of standards and qualifications; or
- the achievement of access, redress, quality and the other related goals of the democratic transformation of education and training.

Given its origins and its scope, many South Africans have justifiably high expectations of the role of the NQF in the transformation of education and training. However, the NQF was never intended to achieve transformation on its own, and could not do so. Some South Africans may have looked to the development of the Framework itself (in the sense of the first or second meanings referred to above) to bring major progress toward access, redress and progression. If so, this may explain their disappointment at the rate of implementation since 1995.

The NQF is not an end in itself. It is an important vehicle, closely allied to and dependent on others, for contributing to major transformation of the education and training system. Real change will require the commitment of employers to skills development, improved capacity and performance in the school, technical college and training sectors and in many universities and technikons, and a great increase in the number and distribution of skilled assessors and other forms of educational expertise. To succeed, reforms of qualifications systems, including the NQF, must be strategically linked to institutional reforms, improved resources, and a focus on capacity building. This requires clear leadership across the learning system.

2. The Departments of Education and Labour should assert their leadership of the NQF

SAQA is required to “oversee” the development and implementation of the NQF. This implies a leadership role, but one that must be exercised in a consultative manner and in co-operation with the state departments, statutory bodies, stakeholders and providers. SAQA has its critics, and it may have made its share of errors, but it has provided leadership across a very wide terrain, as it is required to do.

Many submissions to the Study Team felt that there was a less than full commitment to the NQF on the part of government. Ironically, the SAQA executive considered itself to be in a position of “high pressure” (to deliver) and “low support” (from the government), a recipe for conflict and demoralisation. It looked to the sponsoring state departments in particular for the “high support” that would enable it to absorb the pressure of high expectations and turn it to advantage.⁽²⁾

Lack of leadership, an absence of strategic and operational planning, and uncertainty over the respective responsibilities of SAQA, DoE and DoL were among the issues raised most frequently in the submissions we received. SAQA itself was held responsible and therefore blamed for wrong priorities or delays, even in some matters over which it had no control. Many of those making submissions to us did not seem fully to appreciate the role that should be played by a range of agencies in the roll-out of the NQF. Few respondents commented on the connections between the NQF and other state initiatives, and how the system of provision needs to be resourced in order to widen and improve the opportunities for learning.

The NQF is the joint responsibility of two Ministers and two Departments, but the achievement of even small steps towards a more integrated system of education and training depends upon the actions of several government departments, all provinces, employers and civil society.

The Study Team's recommendations should clarify the roles of the bodies involved in implementing the NQF and suggest how leadership could be exercised more effectively. Effective leadership is a prerequisite for the NQF to fulfil its promise.

In our recommendations we will assert the leadership role of the Departments of Education and Labour, and suggest how the role of the SAQA Board and its officers and committees should be more clearly defined.

3. An overall national plan for NQF implementation is needed that will match resources with NQF objectives

The goals of access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development are a vital element in the development of South African education and training policy. They have brought coherence to policy development and provided it with a clear direction. They should also be used to guide the setting of priorities and provide transparent performance indicators for evaluating the success of implementation.

The DoE and DoL, together with SAQA, have an opportunity to operationalise the goals in an overall integrated plan for NQF implementation, including short- and medium-term targets and resourcing requirements. Such a plan would give much-needed focus to the attainment of NQF objectives and make clear the respective responsibilities of all parties in the process and how they link together.

Implementation of the NQF is crucially dependent on available capacity at every level. In using the term capacity, we refer to both funds and human resources. A plan for implementing the NQF that is not based on a realistic assessment of available capacity, and how that capacity might be enhanced, would be worthless and could lead to a loss of confidence in its overall goals. Given the breadth of vision of the NQF objectives, it would be particularly important to determine immediate priorities and sequences of action, and thus clarify what outcomes need to be achieved earliest and what could be deferred.

In keeping with the spirit of the SAQA Act, such a plan and its implications should be decided upon after widespread consultation and executed co-operatively.

4. The policy on integration of education and training should be reaffirmed and clarified

The term "integration" has been an important aspect of the policy discourse on education and training since the early 1990s. As discussed in chapter 2, the creation of an integrated education and training system and the establishment of a single Ministry for that purpose was proposed by the National Training Strategy Initiative report, the ANC Policy Framework and the RDP base document. However, a single Ministry was not created in the Government of National Unity in 1994, and the goal of an integrated system was replaced by the idea of "an integrated approach" to education and training.

The 1995 White Paper on Education and Training included an exposition of what this concept meant, including these paragraphs:

"Education and training are each essential elements of human resource development. Rather than viewing them as parallel activities, the Ministry of Education believes that they are in fact closely related. In order to maximise the benefits of this relationship, the Ministry is committed to an integrated approach to education and training, and sees this as a vital underlying concept for a national human resource development strategy.

"An integrated approach implies a view of learning which rejects a rigid division between 'academic' and 'applied', 'theory' and 'practice', 'knowledge' and 'skills', 'head' and 'hand'. Such divisions have...helped to reproduce very old occupational and class distinctions...and have been closely associated in the past with the ethnic structure of economic opportunity and power."⁽³⁾

The term "education and training" is used consistently in the policies and legislation of both the Department of Labour and the Department of Education. The two departments have collaborated in setting up and supporting the NQF, developing the learnership concept, and designing the national HRD strategy. Despite the apparent identity between major policy goals of the two departments, they seem to have made no attempt to analyse in further detail how the integrated approach to education and training should be operationalised, especially in areas where the departments do not see eye to eye.

Not surprisingly, different interpretations of the term abound. It has been rightly said that:

"For some, [an integrated approach] is actually an integrated system. For others, it is two systems running side by side and if you occasionally look over the fence dividing the two, that's the integrated approach."⁽⁴⁾

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SAQA has had no option but to engage with the concept even in the absence of clear policy direction. Some of the most vehement debates about the NQF have occurred when the integrated approach has had to be translated into level descriptors, qualifications descriptors, and the specification of unit standards. Compromises have invariably emerged, but less heat might have been generated and much time gained if there had been clearer policy guidance on this matter from the outset.

The Study Team emphasises the importance of the rationale for an integrated approach sketched in the Education and Training White Paper. The concept preserves the invaluable notion of a single inter-connected national learning system, which has been of fundamental importance to the transformation process. The NQF was created to bring the systems together in “an integrated national framework of learning achievements”. But at the risk of going over old ground, we affirm that an integrated approach should not mean erasing all differences between education and training or making all qualifications fit a single set of criteria (except for the minimum necessary requirements). The perceived threat of such an idea of integration has given rise to fears, expressed in many submissions to the Study Team, that the essential, distinct purposes of education and training may be undermined.⁽⁵⁾

As the White Paper suggests, education and training are best seen as representing a continuum of learning. While general and vocationally oriented programmes of learning have different purposes, these purposes overlap and can be profitably linked within a single framework. For one thing, many qualifications fall into neither the education nor training camps but are combinations of both. For another, learners need increasingly to move from one to the other, and one of the important contributions of the NQF is to make this happen more efficiently and coherently. There are a variety of ways of devising links between qualifications based primarily on the assessment of work-based learning and those designed for general education. One of SAQA's primary responsibilities is to oversee and facilitate the development of such links or bridges. The learnership concept, developed jointly by the Departments of Labour and Education, embraces such cross-over links and inter-dependencies.

An integrated approach to education and training must mean therefore that each is enabled to impact on the other for the benefit of the learner. Vocationally oriented qualifications need to include elements of general education, so learners become equipped both for employment and further study. Similarly learners in general or academic education need to develop skills that will enhance their employability. There are obvious dangers of task drift if vocational qualifications become too narrow and of academic drift if they become too general.

Union representatives have submitted to us that many workers may be held back in their skills development and career paths by an over-specification of fundamental learning. However, in practice much skills development needs to build on fundamental learning. Achieving an appropriate balance of education and training elements in any standard or qualification by ensuring that it is fit for purpose will require continuous research, development and evaluation.

5. Simplicity, clarity, flexibility and trust should be the hallmarks of successful NQF implementation

All national systems of qualifications have to include an enormous diversity of types and levels of learning. A common historic response to diversity has been to evolve multiple qualifications systems, based often on quite different principles. This has created barriers to access and progression because the bodies responsible for general, professional and vocational qualifications have tended to recognise only their own awards and no one else's.

The NQF is an ambitious attempt to overcome the barriers between types of learning and qualifications (and the legacy of apartheid divisions) by locating all qualifications within a single common framework, something that has not yet been fully achieved in any other country. The task is even more complicated because learning programmes are diversifying so rapidly in response to the emergence of new jobs, especially in IT and services. New jobs frequently require novel combinations of skills and knowledge at different levels. Standards setters and qualifications designers must respond to such requirements, but it is not always obvious how to do so while maintaining the disciplines imposed by a single national framework.

Inappropriate responses to complexity and diversity must be avoided. One such response might be to go overboard in demanding higher and higher levels of detail and specificity. Another might be to create generic specifications at higher and higher levels of abstraction. A third might be to yield to a *laissez faire* or “anything goes” mentality.

Standardisation of qualifications has an important role to play in a diverse society, in particular by generating public credibility, but common criteria must be balanced by flexibility in interpretation. A high standard clearly stated must be balanced by the diverse ways in which it can be achieved. Thus specifications of standards and qualifications must be fit for purpose, as described by providers and stakeholders who are directly involved in their achievement and application. Occupational sectors (as represented by SETAs and professional bodies) as well as school sectors, colleges and higher education institutions need to be allowed to interpret general specifications for the design of standards and qualifications in relation to their own needs, subject to NQF quality assurance criteria. They must be helped to develop the capacity to do so.

It is also very important that procedures, such as those for registration of standards, are no more complex than they need to be. An inclination to develop very detailed procedures springs from a commendable impulse to ensure high quality and maximum commonality across diverse groups of users. However, such an impulse is mistaken when it leads to an excessive preoccupation with procedures. As international experience shows, unless checked the impulse to over-regulate can result in cumbersome and time-consuming processes whose added value is doubtful. Successful implementation of the NQF will require ongoing vigilance to ensure that procedures are as simple as possible, without compromising the commitment to quality and public credibility.

The implementation of the NQF involves trust and must invite it by being transparent and comprehensible. It must make sense to those who are expected to benefit from it. An obscure and jargon-laden vocabulary cannot inspire trust. It is true that the construction of a single national outcomes-based framework embracing all qualifications inevitably involves the development of new terms and definitions. But the new vocabulary can easily become a form of insider language that excludes and alienates non-initiates. Instead of being transparent, SAQA's processes would then seem opaque and obscure, as they do to many. As a result the NQF might be dismissed as incomprehensible and irrelevant to ordinary people's concerns.

Such dangers can be minimised by

- emphasising that the purpose of specialist language is to define terms, such as “level” and “outcome”, that can be used equally effectively in a variety of contexts: that is, they aid communication across sectors and thus help unify the system;
- ensuring that new terms are introduced only where necessary; and
- ensuring that stakeholders and experts test the usefulness of any new terms.

Trust lies at the heart of all quality systems. This has been well expressed by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS):

“In all cases of certification by the SABS, its credibility lies in the manufacturer's gain and the buyer's guarantee. Every time a product or quality system is certified, the SABS risks its reputation for fairness, honesty and technical expertise – a reputation it has built up over many years. The trust that industry and consumers have in the SABS is in fact its main stock-in-trade, so this risk is not taken lightly by the organisation.”⁽⁶⁾

Trust lies at the heart of quality education and training and it is a core feature of the qualification process itself. A qualification or a standard that has credibility is one that is trusted by specific networks of providers and users. In the past such communities were occupationally narrow, male-dominated and racially exclusive. As SAQA rightly insists, the membership of such communities must become fully representative, and that is a task for everyone involved in the implementation of the NQF.

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There is another and less obvious sense in which communities of trust must be built. The social acceptance of the value of qualifications rests on the trust that is embedded in practice and experience, the knowledge that one can generally rely on someone with a particular qualification to do a good job, or cope with the demands of a higher level learning programme. Admittedly a qualification cannot be a foolproof guarantee. It reflects the competencies and attributes that were assessed at the time of the award, not necessarily how well they have been transferred to a different work setting or a further learning environment. Nevertheless, a qualification is either trustworthy or it is not. Users of a qualification expect to be able to trust its design and assessment procedures. If it is proved in practice to be an unreliable measure of learning, it will be discounted or dismissed.

The NQF will not succeed if standards and qualifications are poorly designed, poorly assessed, or awarded without proper regard for their worth. All phases of the quality cycle must be taken seriously, or else the foundations of trust in our qualifications will be eroded and the NQF itself will be devalued.

6. The stakeholder principle should be strongly upheld and appropriately applied

The stakeholder principle is an important feature of governance in post-apartheid South Africa. In education and training it has been a guarantor of legitimacy and accountability, not least in the NQF. It is expressed in the composition of the SAQA Board and in the six categories of NSB membership.

The participation of stakeholders in standards setting is not merely an expression of democratic principle but a fundamental requirement of good professional practice in many fields of learning, though not necessarily in all. (It is not appropriate in a number of disciplines in higher education, for instance, where peer evaluation is the norm.) The scrutiny and approval of stakeholders is meant to ensure the relevance and acceptability of standards and qualifications to users and the public. While accepting the principle, many respondents to the Study Team regarded the practice of stakeholder representivity as a significant reason for the slowness of standards design and registration, if not the major reason.⁽⁷⁾

Poor attendance at meetings by stakeholder representatives is one factor. Despite the best efforts of SAQA's NSB co-ordinators and NSB chairpersons, members' participation in NSB (and many SGB) activities has generally been low. The work has been taken forward by a core group of determined volunteers, comprising perhaps only half of the membership. State department representatives have been named as particularly poor attenders. Union representatives may only attend if their employers give them time off and this is frequently not given. Community representatives often find NSB membership a burden too many.

Lack of expertise is another factor. Despite the meticulous criteria for NSB membership (which require that members are knowledgeable), it is widely acknowledged that many members lack competence in specialist sub-fields, or have little or no experience of particular levels or sectors (higher education was frequently mentioned). Few people have expertise in both general and vocational education and training, but may be required to deal even-handedly with standards and qualifications in both. Moreover, inexperience in the design of qualifications based on unit standards is widespread.

No submissions opposed the stakeholder principle as such, but most commented that its application was, or threatened to become, unmanageable. The Study Team is convinced that the stakeholder principle is an important basis for widening the ownership of the NQF and ensuring the acceptability of standards and qualifications, and in our view it must be retained. However, the involvement of stakeholders in the design and delivery of standards and qualifications needs to be managed carefully if confidence in the principle is not to be undermined.

The term "stakeholder" must be properly applied in the context of standards setting. In the first place, it is inappropriate to refer to the Departments of Education and Labour as stakeholders in the NQF, since they are responsible for advising Ministers on and implementing the NQF policy of the elected government. The DoE and DoL insist on this point, and the Study Team agrees. Secondly, providers of education and training are not stakeholders in the ordinary sense, especially public providers who have a general mandate and do not represent a particular constituency or interest. Such providers have a specific role in the delivery of education and training and they must be involved in standards setting in their own right, by virtue of the knowledge and experience they

bring to the process. Thirdly, the term “stakeholder” is not the opposite of “expert”. Many stakeholder representatives have high levels of expertise on which the system depends. Fourthly, the stakeholder group should include credible representatives of the users of standards and qualifications, including the social partners and equity groups.⁽⁸⁾

Effective participation in standards setting raises questions of capacity. This has two aspects: the importance of building capacity, and the problem of releasing people from other work.

- It is true that close involvement in standards setting, if professionally managed, may itself be a form of capacity building and very welcome on those grounds. On the other hand, the primary function of standards setting is to set standards, not to build capacity. An over-emphasis on the capacity-building role can only slow down the process of standards and qualifications design.
- The problem of time-off for designated employees has no simple solution. The proliferation of NQF-related bodies requiring stakeholder participation has laid great burdens on the sending organisations. It puts serious pressure on unions and NGOs who must find appropriate nominees for intense involvement in a very wide range of functions. It puts great pressure on the nominees to seek time off for all meetings and similar pressure on employers to release them. SAQA may be able to play a facilitative role in helping to resolve such problems, but they are inherent in a highly participatory system and they will not go away.⁽⁹⁾

The stakeholder principle will be applied more effectively if the demands made upon stakeholder bodies are reduced. This can be achieved by reducing the number of NQF structures in which stakeholder representation is required. We address that issue below.

As importantly, a distinction needs to be made between NQF functions that require representation by stakeholder bodies and those that do not. Qualifications design has both technical and political aspects which up to now have tended to be conflated. Failing to make the distinction has increased the pressures on stakeholders, aggravated the absentee problem and led to the delays referred to in many submissions.

- Technical aspects of qualifications design relate to the high-level understanding of the precise knowledge, skills and values, and assessment requirements, that need to be captured in a particular standard or qualification to ensure that it is fit for its purpose. Such technical aspects should be the primary responsibility of specialists, be they drawn from the ranks of stakeholders, providers, academics or public servants.
- Political aspects of qualification design refer to the role of the wider body of stakeholders in scrutinising the outcomes of the work of specialists, to verify that standards and qualifications meet the criteria that reflect the objectives of the NQF.

Maintaining this distinction will ensure that the stakeholder principle is honoured but applied in the most effective way.

7. Standards setting and quality assurance should come under the same roof

The Study Team has been obliged to explore ways of speeding up the processes of qualification approval. We have examined the possibility of simplifying the design principles on which the SAQA architecture and the process of implementation are based.

The SAQA Act separates standards setting from quality assurance. The argument for separation has not been well elaborated, but the Study Team understands that separation has been justified on the grounds that combining the two functions could lead to conflicts of interest. The Study Team is not persuaded that such need be the case.

The actual standards setting and qualifications design ought to be subject to quality management, as the NSB Regulations make clear. Moreover, guaranteeing the quality of a learning programme and the assessment that leads to a qualification are not separable from how the standard is set or the qualification designed. In fact the two processes of standards setting and quality assurance are inherently linked. If those who set standards have no experience of, or responsibility for, assessment and quality assurance, they are more likely to develop undeliverable standards and qualifications, or standards and qualifications for which there is little demand.

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Our conclusion is that it would be correct in principle and there would be much to gain if the same bodies undertook standards setting and quality assurance. In many countries, universities, professional bodies, and examining bodies for lower level qualifications have both sets of responsibilities. Organisational safeguards can be built in to ensure the integrity of both standards setting and quality assurance processes. In chapter 7 we take forward the argument for the principle of bringing the two functions under one roof and make proposals for altering the standards setting structure of the NQF.

Summary

The following guiding principles underpin the Study Team's analysis and recommendations in the remainder of the report:

1. The NQF is a major vehicle – but not the only one – for the transformation of education and training

Achieving the objectives of the NQF depends on more than the design of qualifications and standards. The NQF is a cornerstone of transformation in education and training but there are other important elements in the edifice of transformation as well.

2. The Departments of Education and Labour should assert their leadership of the NQF

The Departments of Education and Labour working closely with SAQA must exercise strategic leadership of the implementation process. Leadership and a clear division of responsibilities are crucial at all levels of implementation.

3. An overall national plan for NQF implementation is needed that will match resources with NQF objectives

There are several strategies and plans for HRD, skills development and education but no overall national plan for NQF implementation that clearly distinguishes priorities, outcomes, short- and medium-term targets, sequences, resources and responsibilities, and enables the public to appreciate measurable indices of success.

4. The policy on integration of education and training should be reaffirmed and elaborated

The idea that a qualifications framework is integrated means that it is a single framework that includes all qualifications, and that academic and vocational qualifications represent a continuum of education and training, not a division between them.

5. Simplicity, clarity, flexibility and trust should be the hallmarks of successful NQF implementation

The design of qualifications and systems of quality assurance rely on clear criteria that must be amenable to flexible interpretation to ensure fitness for purpose. Building wider communities of trust between providers and users of qualifications is an essential basis for success. Simplicity in language and structure will enhance ownership and participation.

6. The stakeholder principle should be strongly upheld but appropriately applied

The stakeholder principle is essential for legitimacy, accountability and quality. However the identity and role of stakeholders needs to be clarified. Stakeholders and specialists are not necessarily different people, but there is a distinction between the technical process of design and the political function of screening to ensure that NQF criteria are met.

7. Standards setting and quality assurance should come under the same roof

The SAQA architecture can be streamlined without compromising quality. Standards setting and quality assurance should, wherever possible, be the responsibility of the same body.

Endnotes

(1) See Ministers' forewords to SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, pp. 1, 2.

(2) SAQA presentation to the Study Team, July 2001.

(3) Ministry of Education, *White Paper on Education and Training*, p. 15. See also Kenneth King, "Policy coherence in education,

training and enterprise development in South Africa: the implementation challenge of new policies," in Wally Morrow and Kenneth King (eds.), *Vision and Reality*, pp. 4-19.

- (4) S B A Isaacs, "SAQA and the Implementation of the NQF," in CEPD, *Reconstruction, Development and the National Qualifications Framework*, p. 20.
- (5) SAQA Act, 1995, section 2(a).
- (6) SABS, "The South African Bureau of Standards in Perspective," at <http://www.sabs.co.za/12.html>.
- (7) Chapter 4 provides many examples from education and training. For stakeholder participation in standards setting for products and services see South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) website at <http://www.sabs.co.za/1.html>.
- (8) SABS standards are developed by stakeholder-based technical committees whose members are appointed by stakeholders "at the highest level of expertise in the particular field". See <http://www.sabs.co.za/1.html>.
- (9) At least one SETA has taken action to facilitate "the active and effective participation of all stakeholders on its structures". See Mining Qualifications Authority, "Guideline for the promotion of effective stakeholder participation in the Mining Qualifications Authority: Draft 2. For discussion purposes only," [Johannesburg, n.d.]. This document explains the responsibilities of the respective parties to MQA structures, the protection of stakeholder representatives and employers' operational requirements, and assistance to be rendered to stakeholder representatives.

PART TWO

QUALIFICATIONS DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

This chapter tackles the all-important question of how standards and qualifications ought to be understood in the context of the NQF. It examines some of the stumbling-blocks to rapid implementation that concern so many of those who made submissions to the Study Team. The chapter explores significant issues in the design and implementation of qualifications, including the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). We make recommendations aimed at speeding up the introduction of new qualifications and avoiding potential pitfalls in their implementation.

The issues are grouped under seven headings:

- OBE and standards;
- assessment;
- whole qualifications and unit standards;
- NQF levels;
- fitness for purpose;
- Critical Outcomes; and
- RPL.

OBE and standards

The principle of outcomes-based education and training (OBE) is central to the development of the NQF. The rationale for OBE has a number of strands:

- eradicating the apartheid legacy of qualifications based on the institution attended rather than the knowledge and skills of the learner;
- providing a means to give a broader range of stakeholders influence over the design of qualifications;
- improving the portability of qualifications;
- making qualifications and learning programmes more transparent for learners; and
- creating a basis for international comparability.

The concept of OBE was endorsed in many stakeholder submissions and challenged in none. The acceptance of OBE is one of the successes of NQF implementation to date.

Implementation of OBE requires a concept of *national standards*. These have been described as “specific descriptions of learning achievements agreed on by all major stakeholders in the particular area of learning”. This general definition of standard is applicable to qualifications based on exit-level outcomes and assessment criteria (often referred to as “whole qualifications”).⁽¹⁾

An important subset of national standards is the *unit standard*. This is defined in the same document as a “registered statement of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria... together with administrative and other information specified in the NSB regulations”. This definition of standard is applicable to qualifications based on unit standards and, of course, to unit standards themselves. SAQA provides further guidance on the generation of standards. The document stresses that “the criteria embody the guidelines for good evaluation, and should not necessarily be followed to the letter. In this sense, there are ‘no right answers’.” (Several submissions indicate that in practice this wise maxim may not always be adhered to, either by those developing standards or by those responsible for processing draft standards prior to registration by SAQA.)⁽²⁾

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SAQA's statement embodies the spirit of flexibility and emphasis on purpose rather than form that we believe to be essential. If interpreted in this spirit, existing regulations could allow all sectors of education and training to generate standards that are appropriate to their different needs and purposes.

However, there are some aspects of the standards-based approach that require careful interpretation. In various documents it is stressed that standards and qualifications are quite distinct from curricula and learning programmes. This is a correct distinction. The same standards can be achieved through learning programmes that vary to some extent in content and to a large extent in pedagogy. To associate standards and qualifications with one model of learning programme would restrict the opportunities for learners and the creativity of providers. Qualifications and standards are about transparency and accountability to learners and users. Curriculum and programme development must deal with other issues such as sequence of learning, pedagogy and resources. Moreover, the curriculum can often include wider aims that do not need to be captured in standards.

Notwithstanding our agreement with the general principle of separating standards and qualifications from curriculum and learning programmes, the Study Team believes strongly that standards and qualifications must not become divorced either from the providers of education and training or from those who use them for recruitment and selection. The generation of standards and qualifications without the adequate involvement of providers can create problems of practicability and validity.

There is a general point here. Standards and curricula exist in an iterative relationship with each other. Curricula must be developed in accordance with national standards; at the same time the statements of national standards may need to be adapted in light of the experience of those interpreting them to develop curricula. In some cases, standards can properly be understood only when the associated curriculum has been developed. In many cases, the generation of standards will precede the development of curricula or learning programmes. This is assumed to be the "right" model. However there are familiar cases, for example a well-established and internationally recognised degree qualification, or an occupational qualification with widespread stakeholder recognition, where the right approach might be to generate the standards from the existing programme or qualification. Provided the resultant standards are consistent with the goals of the NQF, the route to developing them is of secondary importance.

There is an important specific instance of this iterative relationship. In principle, it is true that unit standards, as specifications of outcomes and assessment criteria, are not modules of learning and teaching. In practice, however, teachers and trainers will look for a close correspondence between the two. This is simply because the task of disaggregating unit standards to create teaching and training programmes, and reassembling them in new ways for assessment purposes, is unduly complex and time-consuming as well as making credit accumulation more difficult. It greatly assists implementation, therefore, when unit standards are devised so as to be easily convertible into corresponding units of learning. Again this emphasises the important role of providers in the standards setting process.

The Study Team also wishes to counsel against an over-reliance on written statements alone in the definition and interpretation of national standards. It is rarely possible to capture what is meant by a standard completely in a written definition of outcome and assessment criteria. It is often difficult, for example, to define precisely the extent of mastery of a domain of knowledge that is required to meet a satisfactory standard. It is also hard to define skills such as oral communication, customer relations, or critical thinking by written statements alone. In all these cases, the exemplification of standards through the work of successful and unsuccessful learners, along with opportunities for providers to meet and discuss both among themselves and with learners and other users of qualifications, is more helpful than the further elaboration of written criteria.

Undue reliance on elaborate written definitions of standards leads to over-specification, bureaucratisation and unusable standards, as the evidence shows from both in South Africa and abroad. Over-specification of criteria and regulations invariably reflects a lack of trust between those with overall responsibility for standards and qualifications and those designing them and interpreting them in curricula.

It is important to remember that an underlying purpose of having standards is to make qualifications as transparent and portable as possible. Transparency and portability cannot be achieved just on the basis of written specifications, but depend entirely on the development of real understanding and trust among providers, learners and other users. The building of such trust involves risks and can only be achieved over time. However, it lies at the heart of all high quality qualifications systems.

Assessment

The Study Team endorses the broad assessment principles SAQA has adopted for the NQF: fairness, validity, reliability and practicability. Putting them into practice is one of the key priorities for the implementation of the NQF. In fact assessment is a make or break issue for the success of the NQF.⁽³⁾

It is noteworthy that assessment issues were barely mentioned in the submissions we received. We assume that this is because the implementation of the NQF has not reached the point where new national standards and qualifications, with their associated assessment requirements, are in widespread use. We are certain that the absence of comment on assessment does not imply that those involved in the implementation of the NQF imagine that assessment is problem-free. The Study Team is aware that it is a very difficult area of practice, both here (as with Curriculum 2005) and abroad. "Integrated assessment", which is an important concept in SAQA's assessment approach, is particularly difficult in practice. International experience suggests that the implementation of assessment arrangements for an outcomes-based education and training system will meet a number of challenges. With due care they can be overcome, but it is essential that they be taken seriously by standards setters, quality assurers and all those in positions of responsibility for the implementation of the NQF.⁽⁴⁾

While we use the term "assessment" in the singular form, we do so only for convenience. We emphasise that assessment practices will differ widely depending on the learning context, whether it be in the workplace, schools, colleges, technikons or universities, and they necessarily will differ within any one of these contexts depending on the nature of the learning being assessed. Assessments, like the standards and qualifications with which they are linked, must be fit for purpose. We confine our remarks to matters that are likely to be important regardless of the form that assessment takes. However, they take on a particular significance in the case of continuous assessment where educators and trainers make judgements on the basis of standards.⁽⁵⁾

The overall assessment regime must be devised taking account of the real implications for the management of learning and assessment. Three issues need to be considered:

- internalisation of standards;
- practicability of assessment arrangements; and
- the role of grading.

Internalisation of standards

Successful implementation of NQF standards and qualifications depends on two factors:

- teachers, lecturers, trainers and assessors developing a common understanding of the respective standards (or outcome statements) that define the qualification their learners are seeking to gain; and
- establishing confidence in the assessment arrangements among the key groups involved in using the Framework, in particular learners, employers and admissions staff in FET and higher education.

Before assessors and learners can really use standards to guide their judgements, they need to be familiar with appropriate assessment instruments and examples of assessed work (successful and unsuccessful) where judgements are to be made about learner performance. In our view, national standards will be effective only when assessors develop a shared understanding, on the basis of discussion, of assessment in practice. Thus capacity building in relation to assessment is not just a matter of top-down transmission, it is a developmental and creative process in which those involved in assessment contribute to establishing a shared understanding of how standards are to be used.

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Achieving such shared understanding with respect to any assessment practice is a significant challenge, not to be under-rated, that will only be realised over time. The task of building such capacity must be scoped and resourced. We regard this as indispensable for successful NQF implementation.

All assessment practices do not need to be developed from scratch. As with standards setting, effective assessment practice will make good use of what has already been proven to work. The establishment of a national assessment bank could save much time and effort by practitioners. The bank would contain assessment instruments teachers, trainers and lecturers could use, advice and guidance on practical assessments, and examples of assessed work that would help both learners and assessors understand and internalise the national standards. The national bank could be created through a number of linked development projects, with contributions from all the agencies with standards setting and quality assurance responsibilities (see Chapter 7) and co-ordinated by the Departments of Education and Labour and SAQA (see Chapter 8). No bank of this kind could be expected to cover all learning areas, but its value will increase as deposits of well-attested assessment instruments are made in it, covering a wide variety of learning fields.

A national assessment bank would have three principal benefits. It would substantially reduce the development burden for thousands of assessors across the country and thus hasten the implementation of the NQF. Secondly, it would greatly assist the achievement of consistency of standards across South Africa. Thirdly, it is a very practical form of capacity building. Using nationally validated assessment instruments and seeing examples of correctly assessed learners' work helps assessors to internalise the standards and should enhance their confidence in developing assessment instruments for themselves.

Practicability of assessment arrangements

A second issue is that of practicability. An outcomes-based system inevitably places new assessment burdens on hard-pressed educators and trainers. It will be important to ensure that they are not over-burdened by the task of creating valid and reliable assessment instruments for all qualifications. The national assessment bank proposed by the Study Team would reduce the need for thousands of assessors in South Africa to reinvent the wheel.

A second aspect of practicability is to ensure that the assessment arrangements are not excessive. They should not place excessive burdens on learners or take away too much time from teaching and learning. These are matters that can be solved only in practice. For that reason the experience of practitioners is not incidental but indispensable to successful assessment. Provided there is a willingness to listen to and learn from the experience of assessors in South Africa and in similar systems abroad, there is no reason why this challenge cannot also be addressed. We therefore strongly recommend that the experience of practitioners in outcomes-based assessment be accessed and used.

The role of grading

SAQA's assessment guidelines link grading to norm-referencing. Norm-referencing is not excluded by SAQA's guidelines but it is rather grudgingly allowed in certain circumstances.⁽⁶⁾

If grading is avoided in the belief that it would be contrary to the values underlying the NQF certain other dangers are likely to be encountered. Inadvertently it might lead to an acceptance of minimum standards, that is the lowest common denominator effect. Some form of grading is an inescapable feature of all systems of education and training. If not formally recognised it will take place informally anyway. If grading is not built into the system, it is likely that it will happen without reference to any public criteria.

It is important to be clear about the terms being used in developing a policy on grading. Norm-referencing is an approach to assessment that judges a learner by comparing his or her performance with other learners. It has traditionally been associated with a system in which a fixed percentage of candidates pass or gain certain grades. Interpreted in this way it is unjust and incompatible with the principles of outcomes-based education.

A candidate who meets the required standard should gain the qualification and the appropriate grade regardless of the performance of other candidates. On the other hand judging whether a candidate has met a standard invariably involves the assessor using his or her own criteria and the comparisons they imply with other learners they have assessed.

However, the performance of a candidate for a qualification can be graded not just in relation to the performance of others but on the basis of criteria that define levels of performance above the acceptable minimum. It is wrong therefore to associate grading exclusively with a version of norm-referencing that assumes a fixed proportion of candidates can reach a given level. By implication it is wrong to suggest that grading is inconsistent with the principles of OBE.

This matter is important because grading has a role to play in raising levels of achievement, in motivating learners and in providing a more accurate statement of their achievement. As in many of the issues that the Study Team has been considering, it is difficult to develop general principles that apply to all learning contexts. However, in most, if not all fields of learning learners can develop degrees or levels of skill or mastery of knowledge beyond a level that would be described as “competent”.

Experience suggests that learner behaviour is significantly influenced by assessment requirements, and that able learners will not stretch themselves if there is no recognition of enhanced achievement. Without grades for recognising levels of achievement a culture of “doing the necessary minimum” can result. The award of grades can motivate learners. It can also provide useful information to users such as employers and those involved in admissions about the capabilities and potential of learners when the question of selection necessarily arises.

Whole qualifications and unit standards

The NSB Regulations distinguish between three related approaches to qualifications:

- whole qualifications (not based on unit standards but on exit-level outcomes and assessment criteria);
- qualifications based on unit standards; and
- unit standards.

All are seen as valid and acceptable expressions of outcomes-based education, and the Study Team endorses this view.⁽⁷⁾

In practice, a broad demarcation is emerging between academically and vocationally oriented qualifications, with the former mainly comprising whole qualifications and the latter being based on unit standards. This demarcation has the potential to enable the various sectors of education and training to develop usable qualifications in ways that suit their distinctive needs and purposes. It represents a pragmatic way forward that the Study Team supports. Indeed, in chapter 7, we will use this demarcation as a means of establishing a clear division of responsibilities for standards setting in the HET band.

The national priority for NQF implementation is to make access to programmes leading to qualifications available to learners as quickly as possible in as many fields of study and occupational sectors as possible. We see no future in endless debates about the respective merits of whole qualifications and unit standards. However, in the longer term, it may be unnecessary and undesirable to perpetuate this division. In practice, all whole qualifications are made up of components whether they are called subjects, modules, credits, courses or even term-by-term topics. The NSB Regulations do not prescribe that unit standards must be of a particular size. Provided that the guidelines for expressing standards are not unduly restrictive, there seems no reason in principle why all qualifications could not use a form of unit standards.

This is a significant issue for consideration because of the importance of allowing qualifications to be achieved by credit accumulation, especially for adult learners. Reducing unnecessary differences between whole qualifications and those based on unit standards will also aid articulation and thus benefit learners.

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The Study Team believes that SAQA and stakeholders should return to this issue at some point in the future after more pressing priorities have been met and more experience has been gained in the design and implementation of the new qualifications.

NQF levels

The Study Team considered the views of the higher education community and SAQA concerning the number of NQF levels. At the time of writing, both had agreed on a temporary compromise for the sake of public discussion. The draft SAQA *Level Descriptors* document and the CHE's draft *New Academic Policy* embody the same qualifications framework for higher education, incorporating four postgraduate sub-levels in Level 8.

The higher education community representatives have agreed to the compromise without conviction. Their conscientious desire is that the distinct types of university qualifications, especially postgraduate qualifications, ought to be assigned to different levels. SAQA's view is that this could be perceived as privileging the higher education sector, which currently caters for a minority of learners, whereas the greatest need for learners to acquire qualifications is in ABET and FET, and the transition from FET to higher education. SAQA also points out that there is already a precedent for using sub-levels for qualifications in the ABET sector.⁽⁸⁾

We have considered the two positions and do not accept that SAQA's arguments are valid. On the first point, our view is that the designation of levels is essentially an exercise in classification, not status. On the second point, the number of potential candidates for qualifications at a particular level is not a valid criterion for determining the need for a level. That determination should rest on the consensus of the stakeholder and provider community with respect to the levels of learning outcomes required for particular groups of qualifications.

Our view is that there are principled reasons why a ten-level NQF that treats bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees as distinct levels (8, 9 and 10 respectively) should be adopted in future. This recommendation reflects:

- common international practice;
- the principle that the framework should be as simple as possible (by avoiding sub-levels wherever possible); and
- the principle that decisions on the NQF architecture should reflect the felt needs of the sectors involved (in this case, HE), except where a contrary over-riding principle is involved. We are not aware of a contrary over-riding principle in this case.

Designing qualifications that are fit for purpose

We emphasise the importance of "fitness for purpose" in the design of qualifications. General design rules applicable to all qualifications have their place in the development of a national framework. They can help to create a sense of simplicity and order across the diversity of education and training provision and hence promote understanding and agreement across the range of stakeholders. There is always a danger, however, that system-wide rules and regulations may be at odds with the essential purposes of particular qualifications. This, in turn, may restrict uptake. We wish to highlight two specific instances.

Firstly, NSB regulation 8(2) requires that a registered qualification should comprise 120 or more credits, with a minimum of 72 credits being obtained at or above the level at which the qualification is registered. This is an appropriate means of creating consistency and parity of demand in National Certificates, National Diplomas, and National First Degrees. However, for many possible qualifications, especially those achieved in the workplace, the 120-credit requirement is an unnecessary constraint that could impede the design of a qualification that was "fit for purpose".

The Study Team notes that regulation 8(3)(a) allows for the registration of qualifications with fewer credits provided they comply with the general criteria specified in the regulations and with the objectives of the NQF. We believe, however, that many stakeholders – including some who are active in NQF developments – are unaware of this provision in the regulations. This may suggest that the provision needs to be expressed in a way that is more explicit and less "exceptional" or discretionary. The Study Team recommends that agencies with standards setting responsibilities be made aware of this flexibility and encouraged to design qualifications based on the needs and purposes of learners and stakeholders.

Secondly, NSB regulation 9(1) prescribes for qualifications at levels 1-4 the number of credits that must be allocated to the following:

- Fundamental Learning (at least 20 credits in Communication Studies and Language, and at least 16 credits in Mathematics);
- Core and Elective categories (36 at level 1 and 52 at levels 1-4).

There is also a requirement that Fundamental Learning credits must be at the same level as the qualification.

However, at levels 5-8, the number of credits required for Fundamental, Core and Elective Learning is determined by the standards setting body, although that body may be required to provide reasons to SAQA for the chosen distribution of credits.

The Study Team believes that a similar flexibility should operate in the FET band and that the specifications in the regulations should serve as guidance. SGBs should, for example, be allowed to present a justification for a different distribution of credits or for Fundamental Learning credits to be at a level below that of the overall qualification. This is particularly important at levels 3 and 4, where the interests of learners and employers may lie in qualifications with greater specialisation, especially if such learners have already attained Fundamental Learning credits at levels 1 or 2.

Learners need the elements of Fundamental Learning in order to progress in further learning or their career path. It is of central importance both in the education of young people and in overcoming the lack of opportunities for school education experienced by many adults in the past. The Study Team is at pains to emphasise this. However, a balance must be struck between encouraging the development of communication and mathematics skills and creating over-burdensome requirements for the attainment of a qualification. In our view, such matters are better resolved through stakeholder debate in the standards setting process than by central regulation.

Critical Outcomes

Introduction

SAQA uses the term “Critical Outcomes” as a shortened form of the term “Critical Cross-field Education and Training Outcomes”. However the latter, cumbersome term is still current in SAQA’s documents. We recommend that it be abandoned.

The NSB Regulations state that Critical Outcomes “include but are not limited to” the following statements:

- a. identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made
- b. work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community
- c. organise and manage oneself and one’s activities responsibly and effectively
- d. collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information
- e. communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written communication
- f. use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others
- g. demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation
- h. in order to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the society at large, it must be the intention underlying any learning programme to make an individual aware of the importance of:
 - i. reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively
 - ii. participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities
 - iii. being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts
 - iv. exploring education and career opportunities, and
 - v. developing entrepreneurial opportunities.⁽⁹⁾

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This list was a compromise adopted in the preparatory phase of NQF conceptualisation. It was meant to bridge two contending positions, one favouring the first seven Outcomes only and the other arguing for the inclusion of broader educational goals.

SAQA's view was that the first seven could "successfully be embedded within Unit Standards" whereas the latter five indicated a general orientation that ought to underlie any learning programme. The most difficult issue would be to ensure that standards setters took the seven Critical Outcomes seriously. A compromise was agreed whereby standards setters would be required to incorporate at least some Critical Outcomes in each standard and explain in the notes what Critical Outcomes were supported by the standard concerned. Proposers of qualifications should ensure that all Critical Outcomes had been addressed appropriately at the level concerned within the qualifications proposed. SAQA acknowledges that "few if any Unit Standards will be expected to promote all – or even most – of the Critical Outcomes" and advises standards writers to "have the Critical Outcomes at hand and try to accommodate them without creating an artificial situation".⁽¹⁰⁾

Critical Outcomes are deemed to be essential for the development of the capacity for lifelong learning. They are a central aspect of the NQF philosophy. Nevertheless, there was little reference to them in the submissions made to the Study Team, probably for the same reasons as we noted in relation to assessment. There seemed to be little awareness about what was involved in incorporating Critical Outcomes into qualifications. Respondents might not be sufficiently aware of the problems that might arise, judging by international experience. In fact, Critical Outcomes could become an inadvertent barrier to implementing the NQF.

It is important therefore that standards setting and quality assurance bodies are clear about these problems and how they should address them prior to developing an implementation strategy.

The Study Team recommends that:

- a distinction be drawn between the first five Outcomes, which are at least potentially assessable, and the rest, which are educational aims;
- Critical Outcomes assessment should be integrated where possible into the core learning and assessment of the qualification;
- the needs of some learners to focus on the acquisition of specific Critical Outcomes skills and to be assessed discretely should also be recognised; and
- generic standards should be developed for the first five Critical Outcomes at levels 1-4, both to meet the needs of learners who are focussing on the acquisition of skills, and to promote consistency and progression in Critical Outcomes standards.

Each of these recommendations is considered in turn below.

Distinguishing assessable and non-assessable Critical Outcomes

We suggest, firstly, that all Critical Outcomes cannot be treated in the same way. The first five are sets of skills that are at least in principle capable of being assessed. However, the last two are not directly assessable and therefore, we believe, are best thought of as educational aims like the group of five listed under "h". Designers of qualifications and learning programmes should strive to ensure that learners have experiences that promote these aims, without necessarily linking them to standards and assessment. Their role is to provide curriculum guidance to providers rather than criteria for standards setters.

The first five Critical Outcomes are regarded in many countries as central to employability. However, given the importance of communication and numeracy (or mathematical literacy) as a foundation for many other skills, we recommend that the fifth Critical Outcome be re-worded so as to make clearer the nature of the skills required.

It is a matter of discussion and debate in different countries, as to whether and which of these Critical Outcomes can and should be expressed as standards and become subject to assessment. Furthermore there are continuing debates as to what form such assessment should take, especially the extent to which this should be free standing or embedded in the assessment of other “core” learning activities.

There are arguments for and against assessment and certification of Critical Outcomes. An argument often advanced in respect of “problem solving” and “critical or creative thinking” but perhaps also applicable to “working with others” and “self-management”, is that such outcomes are context- (and often, content-) specific. Most mathematics teachers can agree what a problem in mathematics is. However it is questionable as to what problem solving in mathematics has in common with problem solving in motor vehicle maintenance or history. Furthermore, learners who demonstrate these Critical Outcomes in a particular subject or vocational context will not necessarily be able to transfer them to other, quite different contexts. This is principally an argument against generic certification.

The counter-argument is that it is never certain that learners will be able to transfer any learning to a new context or contexts. In other words, certification can only imply the potential for such transfer. It would also be argued that while a Critical Outcome such as problem solving poses particular assessment challenges, the assessment of language, numeracy and information technology skills is more straightforward. On this argument it is legitimate to define Critical Outcomes as standards and assess them provided that all stakeholders understand what such certification means and the limitations of the information that it can provide. The Study Team accepts this point of view.

Integrated assessment of Critical Outcomes

Despite the problems involved, there is a strong case that Critical Outcomes learning and assessment should be integrated where possible into the core learning and assessment of the qualification. First, as noted above, all skills are learned and assessed in a context and some skills have little meaning that transcends the specific contexts in which it was learned. Second, stakeholders will not find evidence of generic competence adequate, whether they are employers who want holders of vocational qualifications to have demonstrated competence in Critical Outcomes in the relevant vocational context, or higher education admission staff who equally will want evidence of competence in a subject or discipline.

Discrete assessment of Critical Outcomes

On the other hand, there are skills and knowledge relevant to the Critical Outcomes that can be taught and assessed discretely, that is independently of how they are applied and which students who have acquired them can apply later. It may, therefore be necessary to distinguish between the acquisition of skills and knowledge and the application of previously acquired skills and knowledge in a new context. Learners with poorly developed language or mathematical skills (for example) will not necessarily improve such skills just because they are given practice in using them in a vocational context. Nor can it be assumed that all teachers and trainers have the professional expertise to help the learners develop such skills. Research evidence suggests that it is extremely difficult to apply skills that you do not already have. Thus learners who have not developed their basic language and mathematical skills at school will probably need to undertake units of learning focused on the language and mathematics that underpins the Critical Outcomes. It is therefore important that teachers and trainers (and learners themselves) know the learners’ prior level of attainment, especially in language and mathematics, so that their learning needs can be more easily identified and met. This in turn implies the need, where possible, for consistency and progression in Critical Outcomes standards.

Generic standards for Critical Outcomes

The Study Team proposes, therefore, that generic standards should be developed for all the first five Critical Outcomes at levels 1-4. (There may be a need to prioritise the development of certain Critical Outcomes or certain levels.) These generic standards could be used by standards setting bodies in their qualifications and standards in any way that they deemed appropriate.

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This would ensure a consistency of approach that would make it easier for learners to transfer credit from one qualification to another or to have their learning needs identified. It would also ensure that learners had opportunities for progression in the Critical Outcomes. Generic unit standards could also be the basis for creating discrete units focusing on particular Critical Outcomes.

The Study Team recommends that it should be possible for Critical Outcomes to be assessed either through generic standards or through being integrated into core vocational or general education learning activities.

Recognition of prior learning

Of all the expectations placed on the NQF, the aspiration for a system of recognition of prior learning (RPL) was perhaps the most significant; hence the failure to establish any large-scale provision for RPL has been one of the greatest causes of current disappointment with NQF implementation. RPL is seen as a key to redressing historic inequalities, through formal recognition of the existing knowledge and skills of workers and adult learners. The Study Team cautions against unrealistic assumptions about what RPL can achieve on its own, but we have no doubt whatsoever that making rapid progress in the provision of opportunities for RPL, including the development work associated with it, should remain among the highest of NQF priorities.⁽¹⁾

It is vital to recognise the conditions under which RPL can succeed and ensure that as far as possible these are in place before widespread implementation is attempted. It should not be assumed, for instance, that there is an automatic demand for RPL among workers, employers, learners or learning institutions. It may need to be stimulated by a combination of targeted incentives, information, guidance programmes and joint planning. Even among workers and learners who are strongly motivated to advance themselves, the idea of formal assessment might be alien and indeed somewhat threatening, and such fears will need to be acknowledged and relieved before take up can be expected. Then again, it would be futile and damaging to launch RPL in workplaces or learning institutions before appropriate standards are available against which it could be assessed, so accelerated standards generation and registration geared to likely RPL requirements must be a priority. Finally, it is mistaken to believe that any and all informal learning is readily assessable in an entirely different context. The scope of RPL has its limits, but within those limits it is imperative for the sake of individual redress and the national HRD strategy that its promise be exploited to the full.

RPL must not become a mere slogan. Redress is primarily about creating new opportunities for learning and enhancing existing skills. Insofar as RPL can be a support to this process it is important. On its own it is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment. The most successful examples of RPL in other countries are found where existing providers have developed new access routes to education and training opportunities for those previously excluded through not having the appropriate entry qualifications, for example for access to higher education. RPL should be seen as a developmental strategy for promoting the enhancement of skills and the acquisition of knowledge, not just a strategy for affirming existing skills.

A number of barriers have prevented RPL from taking off. For learners, workplaces and learning institutions RPL is probably still a radical, innovative and untried idea. A new attitude is required, admitting the possibility that current competence can be formally recognised even in the absence of evidence of formal learning. Dealing successfully with RPL requires particular skills, and like all skills these can improve with experience. As with other issues we have discussed this is first and foremost a matter of capacity building, and secondly a matter of commitment to put RPL to the test and get on with it.

Several implementation problems besetting the NQF seem to have thrown up barriers to RPL and delayed its introduction and take up:

- the diversion of time and effort into the reformatting and interim registration of existing qualifications;
- the rather slow and uneven progress made in registering new qualifications and standards;
- delays in accreditation of providers (both public and private);
- requirements for registration of assessors; and
- absence of incentives for providers, employers, learners and ETQAs to attach value to RPL.

We make proposals in chapter 7 that address several of these barriers. The question of incentives lies outside the remit of the Study Team. It is an example of the point we made in chapter 5: that achieving the goals of the NQF depends on the activities of a range of agencies as well as SAQA that go far beyond the development of the qualifications and standards themselves. The government could use targeted funding, directed to providers, as an incentive for them to establish local partnerships to promote new access routes through RPL for those with no qualifications or low qualifications, and develop the support systems RPL candidates will need.

When there is sufficient progress with new standards and qualifications, provider accreditation (including, where appropriate, workplace provider accreditation) and registration of assessors, RPL could proceed increasingly on the basis of normal assessment processes. The current competence of experienced workers could be assessed against the relevant unit standards, using as far as possible naturally occurring evidence, by observing people doing things they normally do. The assessment process would be the same as for trainee workers. In both cases the assessment would provide the basis for the learner to progress in a career path or further education and training. Similarly, learners entering a technical college, technikon or university who believed they could already meet some of the required standards (and who wanted to claim exemption) could be offered the same assessments as would be undertaken by learners who had completed the relevant module or course.

However, there is a need to develop a guidance and information infrastructure to support the opportunities for RPL, especially where those involved have no previous experience of assessment. Employers, learning institutions, workers and learners alike will need guidance in preparing for and undertaking RPL. In particular, workers and learners will need to know that an RPL process is available and how to access assessment. Many learners will need to be counselled in order to overcome their anxieties about assessment. Guidance on the possibilities of RPL should be an integral part of careers guidance that helps learners and workers to plan their future learning and career development.

We conclude with three points that summarise our recommendations on RPL. Firstly, speeding up the registration of new standards and transformed qualifications is a prerequisite for successful implementation of RPL. Secondly, establishing opportunities for RPL is integral to the expansion of education and training opportunities, especially for out of school youths and self-employed or employed adults, and it is integral to programmes of teaching and assessment in workplaces and learning institutions. It must not be regarded or offered as a separate activity, still less as an optional concession. Thirdly, RPL is best seen as a developmental process, a way of either enhancing people's skills and knowledge and enabling them to progress in employment or to enter education and training programmes for which they were previously ineligible. It must not be offered as a stand-alone service unconnected to workers' and learners' broader needs and opportunities.

SAQA's new draft policy document on RPL was published for public comment on 27 February 2002, just as this report was being prepared for printing, so it was impossible for the Study Team to consider it with the attention it merits. However, we are able to give some preliminary views. It is in many respects a characteristic SAQA document: thorough, dense and consistent with the NQF objectives and the national agenda of social transformation though at times somewhat over-rhetorical.⁽¹²⁾

The draft policy document and this report are as one in emphasising:

- the high priority that RPL should be accorded;
- the developmental focus of RPL;
- the need for training of assessors;
- the need for a supporting infrastructure for RPL candidates, workplaces and learning institutions, especially in view of the anxieties each might feel.

In revising the draft document SAQA might wish to consider

- whether the document takes sufficient account of the limits to RPL;
- the question of incentives to undertake RPL, especially for employers and providers;
- where RPL is most required and where it is likely to take place;

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- the extent to which RPL assessments should be within normal assessment practices, rather than a separate science requiring special assessment plans;
- the extent to which suggested procedures could be simplified in order to encourage RPL and make it less of an obstacle course; and
- the adequacy of the document's reflections on local and international RPL practice and published research reports.

Recommendations

The Study Team recommends that:

1. *Unit standards* should

- be devised so as to be easily convertible into corresponding units of learning;
- avoid over-specification of written statements alone;
- include the exemplification of standards through learners' work;
- reflect a relationship of trust between those devising them and those who will use them; and
- be interpreted flexibly in different contexts, as implied in SAQA guidelines.

2. *Assessment arrangements* should

- be devised taking careful note of the views of teachers and trainers on practicability;
- be supported by a national bank of assessment instruments; and
- accept the use of grading, where appropriate.

3. *Qualifications policy* should recognise that

- qualifications based on unit standards and "whole qualifications" are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education; and
- it may be unnecessary in the longer term to perpetuate the division between these two types of qualification, provided that the concept of unit standards is interpreted flexibly.

4. *The NQF* should

- be based on 10 levels, reflecting the qualification requirements of the respective bands and taking account of international comparability; and
- avoid additional sub-levels, in the interests of simplicity.

5. *Qualifications design* should

- be fit for purpose;
- explicitly permit qualifications of less than 120 credits when need is demonstrated; and
- treat the regulations on Fundamental Learning as guidance, so as to allow standards setting bodies to take account of the needs of learners.

6. *Critical Outcomes* assessment should be clarified by

- drawing a distinction between the first five Critical Outcomes, which are in principle assessable, and the rest, which are educational aims;
- integrating Critical Outcomes assessment where possible into the core learning and assessment of the qualification, while recognising the needs of some learners to focus on the acquisition of Critical Outcomes skills and to be assessed discretely; and
- developing generic standards for the first five Critical Outcomes at levels 1-4, both to meet the needs of learners who are focussing on the acquisition of skills, and to promote consistency and progression in Critical Outcomes standards.

7. RPL implementation should be

- accorded priority, provided with appropriate incentives and targets;
- speeded up through the simplification of standards setting and quality assurance arrangements;
- based on the recognition that the assessment processes for RPL do not differ significantly from “normal” assessment; and be
- undertaken in a developmental context with the appropriate guidance infrastructure and training for assessors.

Endnotes

- (1) SAQA, *The National Qualifications Framework and the Standards Setting* (Pretoria, 2000), p. 16.
- (2) SAQA, *Criteria for the Generation and Evaluation of Qualifications and Standards within the NQF* (Pretoria, 2000).
- (3) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (Pretoria, October 2001), p. 16.
- (4) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment*, p. 55. This document explains that integrated assessment refers to:
 - assessing a number of outcomes together;
 - assessing a number of assessment criteria together;
 - assessing a number of unit standards together;
 - using a combination of assessment methods and instruments for an outcome/outcomes;
 - collecting naturally occurring evidence (such as in a workplace setting); or
 - acquiring evidence from other sources such as supervisors’ reports, testimonials, portfolios of work previously done, logbooks, journals, etc.
- (5) See the discussion of assessment methods and instruments in SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment*, pp. 27ff.
- (6) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment*, p. 25.
- (7) NSB Regulations, regs. 7, 8.
- (8) SAQA, *The Development of Level Descriptors for the NQF*, pp. 8-9; CHE, *New Academic Policy... Discussion Document*, pp. ii-iii, 30, 48.
- (9) NSB Regulations, reg. 7(3).
- (10) “Critical Cross-Field Education and Training Outcomes, Decision: SAQA 0204/96” and “Unit Standards, Decision: SAQA 0208/96” in *SAQA Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May/June 1997), at <http://www.saqa.org.za/publications/pubs/bulletins/bulletin97-1.html>. Acknowledgements to Samuel Isaacs and Anne Oberholzer for drawing attention to this reference.
- (11) See Rosie Lugg *et al.*, “Workers’ Experiences of RPL: Lessons for Implementation” and Judy Harris, “Recognition of Prior Learning: Issues in Higher Education,” both in CEPD, *Reconstruction, Development and the National Qualifications Framework*, pp. 111-28, and Mignonne Breier, “Faint hope or false promise? The recognition of the prior learning (RPL) principle of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)”, in Wally Morrow and Kenneth King (eds.), *Vision and Reality*, pp. 119-27. See also RPL research at the Joint Education Trust at <http://www.jet.org/projects/default.asp?id=27> and the University of Cape Town at <http://www.el.uct.ac.za/rpl/welcome.htm>, and in *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1999).
- (12) SAQA, *Recognition of Prior Learning: The Development, Implementation and Quality Assurance of RPL Systems, Programmes and Services by ETQAs, Assessors and Providers. A Policy Document (draft)* [Pretoria: February 2002].

STANDARDS SETTING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Introduction

The written and oral submissions summarised in Chapter 3 raise a number of common concerns about the structural design of the NQF and the standards setting and quality assurance processes. There is a shared belief that the structural design of the NQF is unduly complex, time consuming and unsustainable given the problems of limited financial and human resource capacity in South Africa. This is not to say that all submissions were negative about these aspects. In fact, some were very positive about the experience of being part of the standards setting process. The overall perception, however, is that the implementation of the NQF has been too slow and that, unless changes are made, Human Resource Development Strategy targets will not be met and participation in the process will become more tenuous.

The Study Team believes there is sufficient evidence in the submissions from all sectors to show a need to make urgent changes to the organisational design of the NQF and to the standards setting and quality assurance processes. This chapter looks at a number of key factors underlying these concerns and suggests changes that we believe will speed up the implementation of the NQF by making the process less time consuming, cumbersome and inefficient.

Key factors

Within the area of standards setting and quality assurance, the Study Team has identified seven key factors, which appear to lie behind the slow progress of the NQF development. These are:

- the large number of bodies involved in standards setting and quality assurance;
- the size, composition, nature and capacity of the bodies;
- the standards setting process;
- the field focus of the NQF;
- the complexity of relationships between the various ETQAs;
- the complexity of the quality assurance model; and
- the lack of academic guidelines for higher education qualifications.

Factor One: The number of bodies

As described in chapter 2, SAQA's sub-structures comprise two sets of standards setting bodies and two sets of quality assurance bodies.

Standards setting bodies

Currently there are:

- 12 registered National Standards Bodies (NSBs), one for each organising field; and
- 106 registered Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs); this latter number fluctuates as new SGBs are registered and others have their registration withdrawn or dissolve after completing their brief.⁽¹⁾

Quality assurance bodies

Currently there are:

- 31 accredited ETQAs with three applications under evaluation. This number is likely to increase since SAQA reports that a number of other organisations including statutory and non-statutory professional bodies have applied for ETQA status and their applications are being processed. No Social Sector ETQAs have yet been accredited.⁽²⁾
- No moderating bodies have yet been appointed. These are not envisaged as permanent structures but existing bodies appointed by SAQA to moderate assessment decisions made in respect of specific standards or qualifications.⁽³⁾

Given that NSBs, SGBs and ETQAs operate under financial and human resources constraints a large number of respondents are concerned that so many "bodies with responsibility and authority...populate the NQF", as one

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described it. Many respondents consider that the large number of SAQA sub-structures makes the implementation of the NQF complex, inefficient, expensive in the use of both human and financial resources, and in the end unsustainable.

Factor Two: Nature of the bodies

Both NSBs and SGBs have large memberships. The NSBs have a maximum number of 36 members (which may be exceeded with SAQA's approval). SGBs can have up to 25 members. Groups with such large memberships can be unwieldy, fragmented and difficult to get decisions from in a reasonable time frame. The composition of these bodies also merits discussion. In both cases SAQA requires representation from a full range of stakeholders. While this regulation was developed to ensure that the principles of redress and equity were met and that the "transformation" of qualifications occurred, it does not necessarily lead to a cohesive or effective body. As has been noted in Chapters 3 and 5, the need for full stakeholder representivity on all bodies involved in the implementation is seen as a major reason for the slowness of the design and registration process. However, the "stakeholder principle" is also seen as crucial for the NQF to achieve its goals and the Study Team recognises its importance.

SGBs are temporary in nature. Participation in them is "voluntary, temporary and unpaid", despite their being responsible for the ongoing generation and review of standards and qualifications in a specified skill area. The participation of members has been erratic, as has support from the organisations represented. It would appear that in many cases SGBs do not have the necessary direction, financial and personal support from their stakeholder organisations. The lack of financial resources is seen as a major element in the slow delivery of standards and qualifications. Where SGBs have financial backing they have been able to employ others to write standards while they provide the overview and the technical expertise and knowledge. In such cases standards have been generated more quickly and the SGB has sustained the participation of its members for longer.

International experience indicates that because the SGBs are temporary in nature with limited financial or human resources, they would find it extremely difficult to market their standards and qualifications and develop the necessary ongoing relationships with education and training providers. These aspects are vital to the ongoing success of the NQF. The Study Team believes that standards setting bodies need to be either permanent bodies with viable ongoing financial and human resource capacity or be formal sub-committees of such a body. We also believe that it is important to have clear accountability lines between the standards setting body and the end users of the standards and qualifications to ensure that these are relevant to learners and employers and are supported by education and training providers.

The NSBs are in a similar position to the SGBs though they are supported both administratively and financially by SAQA. It is obvious that an organisation that meets irregularly, where the participants are voluntary and where there can be up to 36 members, is in a difficult position to undertake its designated functions in a speedy and efficient manner. Having twelve such organisations performing these functions is also expensive with a large proportion of SAQA's budget being used to support them.

Factor Three: Standards setting process

The standards setting process itself is seen by respondents as cumbersome and slow, with tight controls being exerted by SAQA. As Gary Granville notes, the work of the NSBs and SGBs is highly schematised with step-by-step stages of work and task schedules. Through the Directorate of Standard Setting and Development SAQA "exercises a model of tight control at all points...binding all participants into a model of work".⁽⁴⁾

This process was considered by many respondents as time consuming, repetitive, frustrating and for some of those involved at the SGB level, alien and off-putting.

SAQA acknowledges that at the beginning the process was relatively slow. However, since late 2000 the Authority has put in place a number of measures to accelerate the standards setting process, in order to improve against internationally benchmarked practice and to meet local demands, especially the pressing need for learnerships in terms of the National Skills Development Strategy. The Authority adopted a four-month turn-around time as a

performance standard for completion of all processes. This covers the period from the date of submission to SAQA of a draft standard or qualification to the date of registration by the Authority. Since 2001, Joint Implementation Plans (JIPs) have been entered into between various parties to a standards setting process, for example a SETA, an NSB, an SGB and SAQA, or between the DoE, the DoL and SAQA. The Directorate: Standard Setting and Development manages each JIP, which is a critical path analysis describing the responsibilities of each signatory and the deadlines to be observed.

The process currently follows this sequence:

1. SGBs generate a standard or develop a qualification against published criteria.
2. SGBs engage in a narrow consultation with stakeholders in the sub-field.
3. SGBs amend the standard and qualification and submit to SAQA for wide consultation. SAQA publishes the draft standard or qualification in the *Government Gazette* for public comment.
4. The public comment is sent to the NSB with the standard or qualification for evaluation against the same criteria mentioned in 1. Recently SAQA has engaged a consultant to assist NSBs by drafting their evaluation reports. The NSB makes a recommendation to SAQA.
5. The SAQA NSB Sub-committee receives the NSB report and scrutinises the proposed standard or qualification. The Sub-committee makes a recommendation to a plenary meeting of the Authority. The Authority registers the standard or qualification.

SAQA reports that the average turn around time is now less than three months. In some cases the process has been completed in two months, depending on the date of submission and the date of Authority meetings. SAQA's figures indicate that the rate of registration of new qualifications and standards has accelerated appreciably in recent months. The number of registered new qualifications and standards in July 2001 was 69 and 1402 respectively, in December 2001 the figures were 137 and 2 422 and in February 2002, 183 and 3 165.⁽⁵⁾

Factor Four: The field focus of the NQF

The design feature of field-focussed NSBs and SGBs also raised some concern among respondents. For organisational purposes, SAQA has divided all education and training in South Africa into twelve organising fields and has established one NSB per field. Despite SAQA stating that fields will not become rigid compartments many of the submissions indicate that they believe this has occurred in practice and that cross-field developments have been limited. It is believed that a number of NSBs are experiencing difficulty in developing qualifications when aspects of the qualification fall within a number of sub-fields and that the current mechanisms for managing inter-SGB and NSB processes are not working efficiently. A rigid field approach also means that no one is responsible for generic standards required by all SGBs, such as in occupational health and safety, management or communication. In the long term this could result in the duplication of a number of standards as SGBs develop their own sub-field specific standards where this is not warranted.⁽⁶⁾

The Study Team believes that while there is a need to classify standards into fields and sub-fields so that learners and other users can find them easily on the database there is no real reason why the SGBs themselves need to fit into a rigid field model. What is important is that they define a legitimate economic sector or study area for which they have the credibility and expertise to be recognised as the key stakeholders and that they develop standards and qualifications relevant to that area. In many cases this will mean they develop standards that will be classified across a number of sub-fields or fields. An effective mechanism for setting generic standards and qualifications will also be needed.

Factor Five: Relationships among ETQAs

Many submissions made reference to the proliferation of ETQAs and the resultant complexity of the relationships among them. They noted that the system of sectoral and band ETQAs had created confusion and unnecessary complexity in the system with a lack of clarity on jurisdiction, an overlapping of responsibilities, and differing philosophies and approaches to quality assurance, all of which had placed immense pressure on providers. The use of Memoranda of Understanding as a way of clarifying relationships was not seen as a satisfactory solution. The submission from CHE/HEQC noted that none had been signed in the HET band because they are such complex and time-consuming arrangements.

Factor Six: Complexity of quality assurance model

Only one or two comments were critical of the quality assurance model in its current form. The Study Team believes that the lack of comment is due more to the fact that few education and training providers have gone through the system than to agreement with it. There is a strong likelihood that both ETQAs and education and training providers will find the system very difficult to manage and very expensive to operate. The Study Team is concerned that this will result either in providers being unable to gain the necessary accreditation of programmes in a timely manner or in the whole notion of quality being devalued because of makeshift accreditation.

The difficulty lies with the number of different bodies and processes a provider would need to go through to be able to deliver a full range of programmes. Under present legislation a private provider (including a company wishing to assess on-the-job competence) must first register with the Department of Education as a private HE or FET education and training institution. This means it must satisfy the criteria for registration as an education and training institution in terms of the FET Act, 1998 or the HE Act, 1997, or both (depending on the range of programmes it offers). It must also undergo institutional and programme accreditation evaluations by the relevant ETQA (possibly in combination with other ETQAs). This means that the provider must satisfy institutional criteria, and each individual programme it offers must be evaluated before accreditation can be approved. Each new programme a provider intends to offer, as new NOF standards and qualifications are registered, will need an extension of its accreditation. In addition, as from the year 2004 all education and training providers will be expected to use registered assessors for summative assessments that culminate in the awarding of credits.⁽⁷⁾

The Study Team believes that the number of separate processes involved in quality assurance is unnecessarily onerous and that it will create an impediment to the implementation of the NOF. In particular, the requirements for individual programme accreditation and registration of individual assessors appear to be overly rigorous and a waste of human and financial resources. While credible learning programmes and consistent and valid assessments are important aspects of a high quality NOF the team does not believe that such processes are necessary to achieve them.

The accreditation of workplaces is another area that is likely to create a major impediment to the implementation of the NOF. The Department of Labour submission in particular highlights this as a critical issue. Under current Department of Education procedures, workplaces wanting to assess against national qualifications are classified as private education and training institutions and need to apply to DoE for registration and apply to the relevant ETQA for accreditation.

For some large workplaces wishing to set up an accredited training centre to offer services to the public this might be appropriate but it is unlikely that the vast majority of small and medium sized companies would go to the expense and hassle of seeking both registration and accreditation. By not doing so they would deprive many workers of the opportunity to gain recognition of their current competence or receive ongoing workplace assessment and training. It would certainly put in jeopardy some of the objectives of the national Human Resource Development Strategy. For example, the objective of having a minimum of 80,000 people under the age of 30 with completed learnerships by 2004 would be difficult to achieve.⁽⁸⁾

Some countries have got around this difficulty by treating workplaces in an entirely different manner from education and training providers on the basis that they have a primary focus unconnected to training and that they do not offer training to the general public. This does not mean that there is no quality assurance process in place or that workers are not protected. The protection is provided in a different way. For example, while workplaces are not required to register or be accredited, they are required to use registered workplace assessors to assess competence on the job. The assessors are registered and audited by a body equivalent to the relevant SETA ETQA and operate within their moderation systems. In most cases the assessors are staff members who have undergone training in how to assess against standards, who have some expertise in the areas they are assessing (though this is not always necessary) and who are of good character and integrity.

The aim is to have assessment as part of the normal routine of work. In other instances employers can use registered assessors from outside their company or accredited education and training providers. The Study Team sees this as a valuable model that could be adapted to South African needs.

We favour applying the principles of fitness for purpose and flexibility to the question of workplace provider registration and accreditation.

The capacity of the Department of Education to register private providers in the FET band is a matter of concern to the Study Team. Legally all private FET education and training institutions (including workplace training institutions) offering programmes leading to qualifications registered on the NQF, must be registered by the DoE. The Study Team understands, however, that the Department has not begun the registration process although the FET Act was passed in 1998. A pre-registration exercise was undertaken in 2001 to assess the scale of the task and determine administrative requirements for registration, and this is now being followed up. Due to the delay the Act has been amended to exempt all private FET institutions from registration until a date determined by the Minister of Education. While in practice this may mean that a private provider who is exempt from registration can be accredited until the date when the Minister lifts the exemption, it is an unsatisfactory state of affairs, as the learner is not protected except through the accreditation process.⁽⁹⁾

Factor Seven: Academic policy for the HET band

The submissions raise two key concerns. Firstly, who or which body is ultimately responsible for the development of academic policy for higher education and secondly, how can academic decisions on matters which currently lack clarity be dealt with urgently so that the registration of qualifications and accreditation of providers can proceed more smoothly and efficiently?

During the Study Team's working life these issues were addressed when the Department of Education released for public discussion the CHE draft document *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education*. The Study Team welcomes the publication of this discussion document, which puts to an end an excessive period of indecision. Apart from the question of the number of levels in the higher education band of the qualifications framework, the Study Team will not comment on this document.⁽¹⁰⁾

Overall changes to standards setting structure and processes

The Study Team proposes a number of modifications to the current practices and structures that we believe will speed up the implementation of the NQF.

New architecture of standards setting

SAQA has created 12 National Standards Bodies to quality manage the standards setters (the SGBs), making sure that the goals and objectives of the NQF and the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders are met. This function is particularly important because of the number (106 in February 2002) and temporary nature of the SGBs themselves.

We propose a different architecture to overcome many of the problems of the present one, as summarised above. Our proposals reflect several of our guiding principles, including fitness for purpose, flexibility, simplicity, developing communities of trust, and wherever possible removing the organisational separation of standards setting and quality assurance. Simply stated, they will require:

- phasing out NSBs;
- phasing out the present SGBs;
- ensuring transitional measures and the retention of valued experience in the standards setting system;
- recognising the Departments of Education and Labour, the CHE and the SETAs as standards setting bodies; and
- recognising fewer quality assurance bodies.

The Study Team believes that the implementation process would be improved if there were a different relationship between standards setting bodies and SAQA. We agree that SAQA should become a more "loosely-coupled organisation".⁽¹¹⁾

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This would allow standards setting bodies the autonomy to set priorities, organise their own work practices and quality management processes, and be accountable to their own stakeholders. As separate organisations they would not be agents of SAQA and their relationship with the Authority would not be a hierarchical one. SAQA would have an overarching role in the quality management of unit standards and qualifications and would ensure that the goals and objectives of the NQF were being met. Each body (SAQA and standards setting bodies) would have clear but differing roles in the process.

The Study Team proposes therefore that a smaller number of autonomous, permanent standards setting bodies be recognised. They should assume the quality management, accountability and leadership functions currently undertaken by the NSBs. In the light of the criticism of field focused bodies it is proposed that the new standards setting bodies straddle any of the twelve organising fields where appropriate rather than be organised around them. SAQA would maintain its overarching quality management function and act as the final arbiter of what unit standards and qualifications could be registered.

This proposal would necessitate the orderly phasing out of the twelve NSBs. The Study Team recognises that many NSBs achieved some good results due to exceptional diligence and perseverance on the part of dedicated volunteer chairpersons and members. However, on balance, we feel that it is more important to have a smaller, stronger echelon of standards setting bodies than to battle on with attempts to strengthen both NSBs and SGBs together under the present arrangements. The current diffusion of responsibilities and roles is simply not conducive to an efficient process.

We feel strongly, however, that the expertise and commitment developed through the NSB process should not be lost. It should be utilised to achieve the goals of the NQF. We urge that SAQA in discussion with the NSBs should find ways of doing so in the context of the new arrangements once they are legislated and come into operation. Adding the strength of the most effective, committed and knowledgeable NSB members to the new standards setting bodies would be one alternative. Assisting the SAQA Standard Setting and Development Directorate in a structured and appropriately remunerated capacity would be another.

We believe that removing one layer of control would provide clearer accountability lines between the standards setters and SAQA and between the standards setters and their stakeholders. It would also reduce transactional costs with fewer parties involved in the process, and speed up the time taken for standards to be generated and processed.

Phasing out the NSBs does not mean phasing out the twelve organising fields. These have a necessary function in the classification of standards and qualifications and should be retained.

New standards setting process

The standards setting function has two inter-related elements:

- identifying the need for particular qualifications and linking qualifications (both within and between sectors and fields) in a coherent way so as to create clear articulation and progression for learners; and
- defining the standards for each of the qualifications.

The importance of the first element must be stressed. This is sometimes called “qualifications mapping”. Without linkages and progression routes, the NQF would not be a framework, but merely a catalogue of qualifications with certain common characteristics. The proposals that follow are designed, among other things, to ensure that bodies with standards setting responsibilities were able to exercise a strategic oversight of qualifications development and ensure coherence.

In Chapter 5 we noted that the stakeholder principle was an important basis for widening the sense of ownership of the NQF and needs to be upheld. We also argued that it was possible to distinguish between stakeholders who were accountable to the organisation that was represented and those who held useful experience and knowledge of a particular field of study. This would allow each stakeholder group to perform separate functions that we referred to as “technical” and “political” respectively.

The technical standards design panels should be suited to the particular task, assembled or recognised by the standards setting body as and when required to do the job and dissolved when the task had been done. The panels would comprise highly competent specialists drawn from a range of stakeholder, provider, professional body, NGO or research contexts. They would provide the necessary technical expertise and knowledge to ensure not only that the content of new unit standards and qualifications was fit for purpose, but also that the specified outcomes were assessable within an education and training environment or a workplace or both. They should also ensure that the standards would be capable of having a learning programme developed for them. Staff from the standards setting body should facilitate such panels.

Standards setting bodies would arrange for the wider body of stakeholders to scrutinise the outcome of a technical panel's work and focus on substantive issues such as meeting equity and redress goals.

Some submissions made reference to the need for pilot programmes to ensure that standards developed were fit for purpose. However pilots are expensive and it is unreasonable to expect learners to be guinea pigs in experiments whose outcomes would be unpredictable. A rigorous but flexible review process with effective feedback loops from users to developers would be more useful.

A standards setting body could develop any process of standards generation it wished to as long as adequate stakeholder consultation were conducted. It would be responsible for the funding, overall development and co-ordination of the process, for quality management and for sending the proposed qualifications and standards to SAQA. It is highly possible, however, that a variety of development methods would be utilised. For example, a standards setting body might set up its own technical panel or agree to standards or qualifications being developed by individual institutions or professional bodies or by consortia of providers. Cross-field qualifications and standards would require standards setting bodies to form partnerships in order to set up or recognise appropriate technical panels. It is extremely important to maintain the principle of flexibility.

Each standards setting body should have the freedom to devise appropriate procedures in relation to its circumstances, so long as the SAQA criteria were met. The following illustration indicates only one possible sequence. At each Yes/No point a decision would be made whether to proceed or refer back to the previous stage for correction:

- standards setting body sets up or recognises technical panel for particular standards setting and review purpose;
- panel generates or amends standard or qualification;
- panel forwards proposed standard or qualification to standards setting body;
- standards setting body evaluates standard or qualification as being fit for purpose, capable of having learning programmes and suitable for registration (Yes/No);
- standards setting body consults with specific stakeholders, regional panels to ensure fitness for purpose (Yes/No);
- standards setting body forwards proposed standard to SAQA Directorate: Standard Setting and Development (DSSD);
- DSSD technically evaluates standard or qualification against SAQA criteria and guidelines (Yes/No);
- standard or qualification evaluated by SAQA Standards and Qualifications Sub-committee as meeting objectives of NQF (Yes/No);
- standard or qualification approved and registered by SAQA Board.

The Study Team proposes that the publication of proposed standards and qualifications in the *Government Gazette* be ended, as it would appear to be an editorial bottleneck as well as an ineffective way of gaining stakeholder comment.

Proposed new standards setting bodies

In Chapter 5 the Study Team argued that there would be much to gain if, wherever possible, the same bodies conducted standards setting and quality assurance. We also adopted the principles of simplicity and ensuring role clarity. On this basis we propose that the SETAs and the CHE become standards setting bodies in their defined spheres as well as performing their ETQA functions.⁽¹²⁾

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The principle of combining standards and quality assurance functions cannot be applied across the board. The Department of Education (with its provincial counterparts in HEDCOM) must fulfil its responsibility for standards and qualifications in the provider systems it controls. The Departments of Labour and Education are the appropriate bodies to set generic standards.

The two departments, the SETAs and the CHE are of course all permanent with close relationships to the key players at the delivery end of the NQF.

These proposals are now discussed in more detail in respect of the GET/FET bands and the HE band of the NQF.

GET/FET bands

For the GET/FET bands the Study Team proposes that the 25 SETAs and the Departments of Education and Labour be recognised as the standards setting bodies for their defined sectors at levels 1-4 of the NQF.

The SETAs already have a mandate for developing a sector skills plan and for promoting training agreements within their sectors. This mandate would help give their role as standards setting bodies a clear strategic focus, the capacity to decide on priorities and to generate relevant standards and qualifications in their mandated areas, and to influence the take up of standards and qualifications by employers and education and training providers. SETAs have access to the National Skills Fund and it is possible that agreement could be reached to allow this fund to be used for standards setting in support of the objects of the Skills Development Act, 1998, the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and the national HRD Strategy. Each SETA would be expected to appoint a standing committee responsible for standards setting (with appropriate committees at chamber level). The CHE, the DoE, DoL and professional bodies should be invited to participate by nominating representatives to deal with matters of common concern.

The scope of the SETAs' standards setting responsibility would include unit standards (including vocational ABET standards) and unit standards-based qualifications at levels 1-4 within their respective spheres of operation.

The wider stakeholder oversight would be ensured through the composition of SETA boards and their mandated functions as they have clear accountability lines to the social partners – organised labour and organised business – as well as individual employers, the National Skills Authority and the Department of Labour. This would ensure that strategic priorities were set, and the targets set by the NSDS and HRD Strategy were met along with labour market requirements. It might also be possible for a wider range of representatives to be nominated to the standards setting committee set up by the SETA where this was thought to be appropriate. Because SETAs reflect the needs of key stakeholders they would have an interest in transforming qualifications rather than perpetuating existing ones, a point made in the COSATU submission.

As we described above, professional bodies, education and training providers and other critical interest groups should be involved in the standards setting process along with role practitioners in order to ensure that qualifications are fit for purpose. This could be achieved through a small panel of highly competent specialists being recruited from the ranks of stakeholders and providers to design the unit standards and qualifications, with the parent standards setting body having the responsibility to sign off the final product.

Other agreed key stakeholders could also be consulted during the standards development phase and evidence of this should be a necessary prerequisite for the registration of the standard or qualification.

While SETAs are at different stages of development and have varying degrees of capacity the Study Team believes that this does not diminish the need for SETAs to be acknowledged as standards setting bodies. Capacity building and the merging over time of some SETAs are strategies that could be employed to bring all SETAs to a desirable level of performance. The National Skills Authority, DoL and SAQA already have substantial experience in assisting SETAs to prepare for ETQA accreditation, supported by a number of development co-operation agencies. A similar project would follow naturally from the earlier work.

The Study Team proposes that the Department of Labour become the standards setting body responsible for the co-operative development and design of generic occupational unit standards and qualifications by groups of SETAs, for example in First Line Management, Employment Skills or Health and Safety. An appropriate SETA could be appointed as the responsible body for standards maintenance and quality assurance.⁽¹³⁾

We propose that the Department of Education become the standards setting body for schools, technical colleges (FET institutions) and general ABET standards and qualifications. (SETAs would develop vocational ABET standards.) The DoE has a clear mandate to develop standards and qualifications for these sectors of provision. It is already involved in standards setting in these areas, has formal and informal accountability lines with the key stakeholders, and has the organisational capacity to perform the role and to liaise with GENFETQA in doing so. The GENFETQA Act was passed only late last year and at the time of writing the GENFETQA Council had not yet been appointed. It will need time to settle into the new quality assurance aspects of its statutory role.⁽¹⁴⁾

The Study Team has noted with great concern the delays in the development of transformed standards, qualifications and curriculum statements for the FET band. We trust that our proposals will assist in clarifying the role of the Department of Education as the standards setting body for the schools, general ABET and technical colleges. However, collaborative relations with the SETAs will be needed in order to access the most relevant expertise and stakeholder support for elements of the transformed FET programme.

The Study Team proposes that the DoE and DoL take joint responsibility for the development of unit standards for Critical Outcomes. This would require close collaboration among all the standards setting bodies as such standards are likely to be required at many different levels of the NQF. Given the urgent requirement for these standards, SAQA should take a proactive and facilitative role.

HET band

For the Higher Education and Training band the Study Team wished to find a way to simplify and clarify responsibilities while at the same time acknowledge the interests of the CHE and SETAs and the overlapping nature of standards setting at these levels. To do this the team decided to distinguish between types of standards setting and NQF levels, and allot responsibility on that basis. The three types of standards setting are categorised as:

- unit standards;
- qualifications based on unit standards; and
- whole qualifications not based on unit standards.

Using this principle, the table below illustrates the standards setting body for each Higher Education band level of the NQF, based on the type of qualification being developed.

The Study Team proposes that the CHE be recognised as the standards setting body for

- all types of standards setting at NQF levels 7 and 8 (which would include levels 9 and 10 if a 10-level NQF is agreed); and for
- whole qualifications at NQF levels 5 and 6.

The SETAs should be recognised as the standards setters in their particular skills sectors for

- unit standards at NQF levels 5 and 6; and
- unit standards based qualifications at NQF levels 5 and 6.

It is important to recognise the SETAs' role in standards setting for their occupational sectors at levels 5 and 6. It would clearly advance career path development in each sector and ought to be undertaken in the spirit of an integrated approach to education and training.

Table 1. Proposed types of standards setting and division of responsibility by NQF level

<i>NQF Level</i>	<i>Whole qualifications</i>	<i>Unit standards-based qualifications</i>	<i>Unit standards</i>
8[-10]	CHE	CHE	CHE
7	CHE	CHE	CHE
6	CHE	SETAs	SETAs
5	CHE	SETAs	SETAs

Because of the overlapping nature of standards setting there would need to be close co-operation among all bodies and it would be desirable that the CHE standing committee responsible for standards setting include representation from professional bodies and SETAs.

Generic standards development requires a special arrangement. SAQA would have the responsibility to work with a lead standards setting body to facilitate co-operation among all bodies in the development of generic standards and qualifications. The Study Team proposes giving responsibility for the facilitation and development of generic unit standards based qualifications to the CHE, with a SETA being designated the responsible body for maintenance and quality assurance purposes. A similar model was proposed for the GET/FET bands.

Role of professional bodies

The Study Team recognises the indispensable role played by professional bodies in advancing the quality of high-level learning closely allied to practice, the development and maintenance of an ethical culture of service and the protection of public interests. This is especially the case with professional bodies that are established by statute. They are themselves engaged in a transformation process aimed at purging a legacy of racial exclusion, gender bias and occupational rigidity. In their written and oral submissions to the Study Team, professional bodies expressed their support for the NQF objectives, noting that their relationship with the NQF was unique in international professional body practice. They described the manner in which their own standards setting processes had been altered to become compatible with the national framework, but indicated some serious difficulties with SAQA's stipulations and mode of operation.

The Study Team notes that its guiding principle of bringing standards setting and quality assurance under the same roof is a familiar part of the practice of professional bodies, whose mandate typically combines standards setting, assessment and quality assurance. The management of all three functions is inherent in their missions, required by their founding statutes, and part of their recognition agreements with the international professional councils of which they are members. They are able to protect the integrity of the respective operations by introducing separate internal governance arrangements or firewall precautions.⁽¹⁵⁾

SAQA has conducted detailed consultations and negotiations with professional bodies over several years, in relation to both standards setting and quality assurance. SAQA has an implied obligation to do so in the case of statutory councils whose own functions might be affected by the implementation of the SAQA Act, 1995 (section 15). However, the interaction has encompassed more than procedural issues. The Authority has worked with professional bodies to promote the restructuring of professions to permit a ladder of qualifications from level 5 upwards (as in accountancy) or even leading from the FET band into the professional sector (as in pharmacy).⁽¹⁶⁾

Statutory professional bodies have autonomy and important duties in terms of their own Acts. Although SAQA has been mindful of their statutory powers, the Authority's position is that statutory councils may "lead, facilitate, co-ordinate and participate in standard generation, without actually being the SGB". Drawing such fine lines may in fact be insisting on a distinction without a difference. Statutory bodies have been in the standards business a long time and have accommodated to SAQA's stipulation by establishing their own standards sub-structures under different names, linked to a SAQA-registered SGB whose creation they have engineered. The Study Team's

proposals for standards setting would allow for professional bodies to create standards setting panels by agreement with the CHE or an appropriate SETA, working to SAQA's criteria and guidelines in their own way and ensuring the appropriate peer review and stakeholder scrutiny.⁽¹⁷⁾

Professional bodies recognise a normal or benchmark route to membership of the profession, which comprises two distinct stages: first, the attainment of an educational qualification (which has training components) and a period of practical training and mentoring (which has some educational components) leading to a test of professional competence and registration. Registration is not a perpetual status. There may be requirements for periodic renewal and where these exist they are part of the competency standard. A registered professional assumes the obligation to comply with the code of ethics or practice prescribed by the professional body. Increasingly, registered persons are required to undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in order to reinforce and extend their competency.⁽¹⁸⁾

At SAQA's insistence both the educational qualification (currently designed by an SGB supported by the professional body) and the standards for professional competence (designed by the professional body) are expected to be registered on the NQF. (Decisions on individuals' applications for registration are strictly the business of the relevant professional body.) While the registration of professional competency standards is generally accepted in the interests of transparency, at least one professional body considers that SAQA has not sufficiently recognised the distinction between a professional educational qualification and a test of competence leading to a professional designation.⁽¹⁹⁾

Professional bodies already have close relations with their corresponding SETA or SETAs and the CHE/HEQC. If the Study Team's proposals for standards setting were accepted, existing Memoranda of Understanding would need to be reviewed and if necessary adjusted. The team believes that the implications of the proposals for professional bodies would be positive, since the effect would be to simplify the system, clarify lines of responsibility, remove unnecessary rules and restrictions, and accelerate the development and approval of standards and qualifications. However, it would be important for SAQA to closely examine its own level of professional interaction with the professional bodies, as with other learning constituencies. It was a recurrent theme of submissions from professional bodies that SAQA officials have failed to acknowledge the essential role of well-attested peer judgement in the setting of professional standards.

Transition arrangements

We propose that the recommended standards setting bodies be formally recognised as soon as possible, that they absorb the existing bodies and their work as soon as practicable and be given responsibility for putting in place appropriate transition arrangements.

The Study Team urges that the expertise of SGB and NSB participants be utilised constructively. It is particularly important that valuable and needed work that is under development is not lost. This should be clearly stated in the new standards setting body's formal transition statement. Many effective members of the existing SGBs should have a role to play in the new process but how this is done should be left to the new standards setting bodies and SAQA respectively. At the same time, members of these bodies whose participation has been nominal or nil should be thanked and excused from further involvement.

The transitional arrangements from the present to the new system should be managed in a swift but orderly way so that the current level of productivity would be maintained during the transition and accelerated thereafter.

Summary of new arrangements

To summarise the new arrangements the diagram below illustrates the simplified standards setting structures.

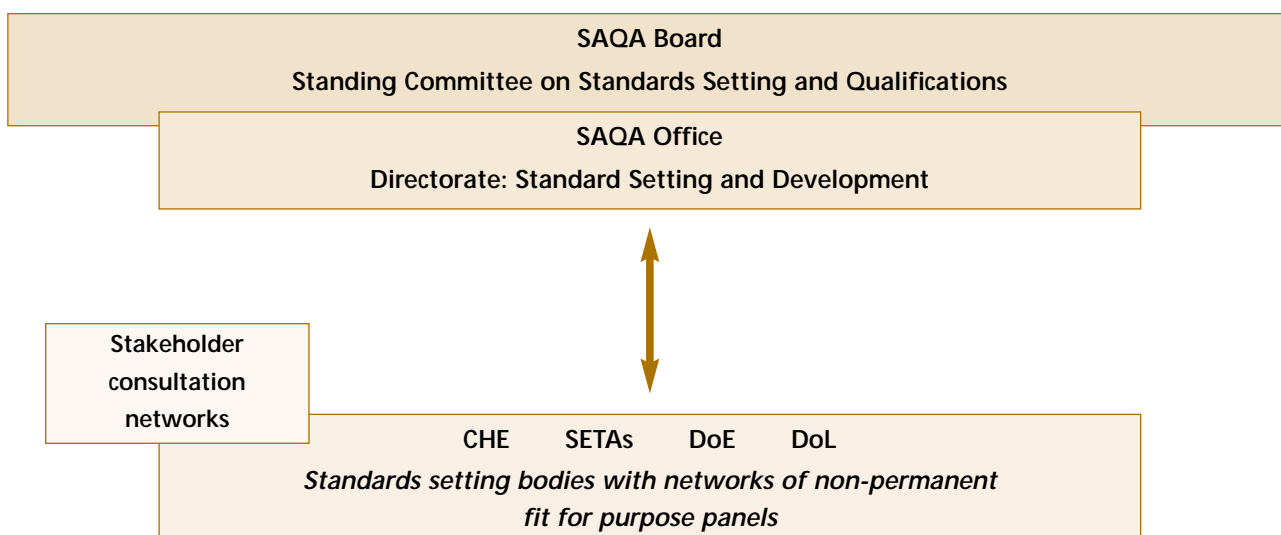
The process would be simple. The new standards setting bodies would send a proposed standard or qualification directly to a greatly strengthened Directorate: Standard Setting and Development at SAQA, for a technical check against published technical criteria. If amendments were necessary the standards setting body or SAQA would

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make the changes depending on the type of amendment required, and the standard or qualification would then go to the SAQA Board via the standing committee on standards for national stakeholder confirmation, then approval and registration.

When the NSB Chairpersons met the Study Team they remarked on the crucial role of NSB Co-ordinators. Depending on their competence (and their availability), co-ordinators could either ensure an NSB's success or condemn it to inefficiency and frustration. In the absence of NSBs the co-ordinators' functions would not end or diminish, although their job designation and specifications might alter somewhat. An essential role would remain for strongly motivated and intellectually acute officials in the Directorate: Standard Setting and Development. They would maintain close links with the standards setting units or committees in the CHE, the SETAs and the two departments, as well as with professional bodies, to help construct and maintain the qualifications map in their field and the cross-field linkages, and to render technical support when needed. The DSSD could mobilise additional capacity, or set up its own panels if required, using the experience and expertise of former NSB or SGB members among others.

Diagram 1. Standards setting structure



If the Study Team's proposals on standards setting were accepted the function of standards setting would take a very different organisational form than at present. The SAQA Act, 1995 and Regulations, 1998 would need substantial amendment.

Proposed changes to quality assurance

The Study Team believes that it is necessary to simplify the quality assurance model and to clarify the relationships among the ETQAs to ensure that the quality assurance process is not excessively onerous or the notion of quality undermined.

Quality assurance model

The Study Team recommends that the current quality assurance model be modified to emphasise an integrated partnership approach to quality, which would rely on four main processes. These are:

- self-evaluation by providers;
- institutional accreditation;
- the ongoing monitoring of provider activities, including spot checks; and
- quality audit.

Self-evaluation. The Study Team believes it is important to see quality assurance as part of a quality improvement process. SAQA's policy is explicit on that point. To that end the team supports making providers responsible for the quality of their own education and training programmes. They would be expected to self-assess their effectiveness against agreed criteria and to determine where they were in terms of compliance with the ETQA's accreditation requirements. Their findings would be reported back to the ETQA and used as part of the accreditation or quality audit process.

Institutional accreditation. We propose that the up front evaluation of a provider leading to accreditation should combine the current institutional and programme evaluation processes in one process. The present necessity to accredit not only every provider but every individual programme offered by that provider is excessively onerous and takes no account of the professional demands placed on the ETQA and the provider system. In our view it is a totally unrealistic stipulation, given the universally acknowledged lack of high-level capacity throughout the system. The present scope of programme accreditation comprises not only each provider's current range of programmes, but every future addition or amendment to that range.

The Study Team is not advocating an abdication of responsibility by the ETQAs. We are aware that learning programmes are the essence of a provider's offering to the public. However, we believe that an ETQA's obligation to undertake meaningful quality assurance would be discharged by evaluating the systems put in place by each provider for ensuring the quality of education and training provision and assessment for a particular scope of activity. The scope of activity would be described in terms of particular NQF fields or sub-fields and NQF levels. For example, a provider could be seeking accreditation for delivering programmes in the sub-field of Horticulture up to NQF level 5. Another larger institution could be seeking accreditation across several fields or all fields of the NQF. The panel making the evaluation would be composed appropriately for the scope of activity being sought.

It is important to note that the qualifications being offered by such institutions have already been through a quality management process and have been approved for registration on the NQF. The accreditation evaluation by the ETQA would focus on the systems in place to ensure that quality education and training and assessment were provided across all of its operations.

In the case of private provision, whereas registration confers a licence to operate as an education and training provider, the accreditation process looks to see if the systems are applicable for operations across a specified scope of activity. By seeking accreditation for a scope of activity rather than individual programmes a provider avoids the necessity continually to seek an extension of accreditation every time it wishes to introduce a new course or when new standards or qualifications are registered on the NQF. (By the same token, the burden on the ETQA is substantially reduced.)

The Study Team accepts that in some professional fields a statutory body is obliged to undertake programme accreditation of an FET or HE provider in addition to the institutional accreditation. In that case the professional body would make the necessary arrangements with the appropriate ETQA.

We comment on the definition of accreditation and related matters below.

Ongoing monitoring. The staff responsible for accreditation within an ETQA would undertake ongoing monitoring of provider quality. This would be done through liaison with other parts of their organisation such as moderation, standards setting, audit and learner information, and through liaison with other bodies involved in the quality assurance and standards setting processes including other ETQAs, professional bodies and SAQA.

Learners themselves would be an important part of the ongoing monitoring process as their feedback on the quality of a provider could stimulate a spot check or a full-scale audit. All ETQAs would have a complaints mechanism to enable learners to make known their problems with a provider's performance and receive a considered response.

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Quality audit. The quality audit is a systematic and independent process for obtaining evidence to verify the performance of a provider as a whole, their management processes for achieving quality learning, and their success as an education organisation. Over and above the need for accountability of accredited providers, audits provide providers with opportunities for self-improvement. They are also a way of managing the diversity within the NQF sectors. Audits for compliance across the diverse sectors help ensure that there is consistent and high quality provision of education and training. While the use of audits is an element within the current SAQA model, the Study Team believes it needs to have a sharper focus and be perceived more clearly as an essential component of the quality assurance cycle that would be consistently applied by all ETQAs.⁽²⁰⁾

Because of the number of ETQAs involved in the quality assurance process, the Study Team believes that it is important to have a common quality assurance standard to ensure that all providers, no matter what ETQA they go to, have to comply with a common set of requirements. Although a broad framework is set out in SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers* it would be helpful if this were fleshed out with an agreed set of criteria for each key element. Agreement could be reached between the ETQAs and SAQA on a set of standards and performance criteria, which would together make up the "Quality Standards for Accredited Education and Training Providers in South Africa". The standards would set out very clearly the mandatory requirements that all providers must meet to obtain and maintain accreditation. Audits would thus be held to ensure that the body was complying with the Quality Standards.

Initial accreditation could include an audit within a specified time period, say of 12-24 months, to ensure continuing compliance. In Australia, for example, audits are conducted at the point of registration (accreditation in the South African context), within the first twelve months of registration for new providers, on a risk management basis during the five year registration period, and in the last twelve months of registration for organisations seeking to renew their registration.⁽²¹⁾

The term "accreditation". The Study Team is concerned that the same term "accreditation" is used in a number of different contexts under the rubric of a single definition inscribed in the ETQA Regulations:

"Accreditation means the certification, usually for a particular period of time, of a person, a body, or an institution as having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by the South African Qualifications Authority in terms of the Act."⁽²²⁾

This is very general. It applies to providers of learning, learning programmes, and ETQAs themselves that must be accredited by SAQA before they can undertake accreditation in their own right. All current ETQAs (except for three non-statutory professional bodies) have statutory recognition. It is correct that they should meet quality standards and performance criteria specified by SAQA, and it is absolutely justifiable that they should be subject to periodic evaluation by SAQA, as envisaged in SAQA's new policy document and manual.⁽²³⁾

However, the term "accreditation" applied to quality assurance bodies in the SAQA Act, 1995 (section 5(1)) may now be a source of more confusion than clarity. Its continued use should be reviewed in the light of experience, especially the different constructions put on the term in the Higher Education Act, 1997 (section 7), the Skills Development Act, 1998 (section 10) and the GENFETQA Act, 2001 (sections 5, 22).

We propose reserving the term "accreditation" within the NQF for provision of learning, and applying it only to public and private providers outside of the schooling system. There are four reasons for excluding schools. Firstly, it would not be practicable to accredit 27 000 schools under a tighter meaning. Secondly, the notion of accreditation does not accord with the state's constitutional and statutory duty to provide education for all and radically improve the quality of provision inherited from decades of discriminatory treatment. Thirdly, schools are subject to quality assurance processes in terms of a number of statutes, regulations and policy instruments. Fourthly, the GENFETQA Act, 2001 in any case excludes the accreditation of public schools.

The following is an example of a definition that states more clearly what the status of accreditation means in relation to providers of education and training:

A status granted after an ETQA has determined that a provider, through its system for the management of quality, has the capacity to deliver programmes within a specified field or sub-field and assess against unit standards and qualifications registered on the NQF. Organisations may be granted accreditation to deliver programmes and assess, or just assess.

An even simpler definition could be:

Accreditation means the formal approval and recognition of an education and training provider, by an ETQA, in accordance with the Standards for Accredited Education and Training Providers.

The ETQA Regulations presently provide that provisional accreditation may be granted for a period of not more than two years, during which time the provider undergoes a programme of development. The Study Team considers that provisional accreditation could also be of benefit to private providers who are currently exempt from registration due to the hiatus in registration in the FET band. If they sufficiently met the standards required for accreditation they could be provisionally accredited until opportunity arose for them to seek registration from the Department of Education. If necessary a provider might be granted provisional accreditation with conditions attached, for example as a limitation on the number of learners that could be enrolled. If they wished to go over the limit they would need to apply again for accreditation, providing the necessary evidence of capability.⁽²⁴⁾

Registration with DoE. Submissions to the Study Team indicate that there is a degree of confusion about which private providers are required to register with the Department of Education. There is a discrepancy between the relevant definitions in the Higher Education Act, 1997 (section 1) and the Further Education and Training Act, 1998 (section 1). The former appears to cover providers that offer whole qualifications and unit standards whereas the latter appears somewhat ambiguous. There would seem to be very little reason to limit registration and thus accreditation to providers who offer whole qualifications of 120 credits. Learners attending courses with less than 120 credits, based on a group of unit standards or a whole qualification, also deserve quality programmes and the protection that registration affords. The Study Team proposes that the legislation be amended to achieve consistency between the two Acts and put the matter beyond doubt. Private providers should require registration if they offer programmes for nationally registered standards and qualifications to the public.

The Study Team proposes that workplaces should not have to register as providers unless they offer programmes at a fee to the public. Registration is designed to protect the public from unscrupulous or incompetent provision by private operators. If the public is not involved, a workplace provider should be free to conduct its skills development programmes for its workforce without being encumbered by the need to register with the Department of Education.

Accreditation of workplace providers. The question of accreditation of workplace providers is more complex, and the principle of fitness for purpose applies. The Study Team sees value in the proposition that workplace providers are arguably different from institutional providers, and that sufficient protection for workers could be implemented through registering staff as assessors and monitoring by the ETQA. There are other considerations. The potential number of workplace training sites is overwhelmingly large. It is inconceivable that every workplace provider offering training to national standards could be subjected to thorough accreditation procedures not just once but on a recurring basis by the relevant SETA ETQA. The vast majority of workplace providers are medium to small businesses or industries for whom the necessity to seek and maintain accreditation is likely to seem an unnecessary burden. In other words the accreditation requirement might turn out to be a strong disincentive for such employers to provide structured training for their employees. We take this risk seriously. For such workplace providers both the need to give encouragement for skills development and the relatively small size of the workforce argue for the use of registered assessors and periodic monitoring by the ETQA. Large workplace providers, however, should be subject to accreditation.

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Registered assessors. SAQA's requirement that from 2004 only a registered assessor could undertake any summative assessment for a registered national standard or qualification is unnecessarily sweeping. It is taking the logic of quality assurance to a quite unjustified extreme. Our discussion of assessment in chapter 6 makes clear that we treat it with utmost seriousness and in fact propose that it be installed as a priority of NQF implementation second to none. We advocate sustained investment in the training of assessors in outcomes-based assessment. A requirement for registration puts the emphasis in the wrong place, on regulation rather than capacity building. Insistence on implementing the policy would be likely to alienate significant sections of the provider community and stimulate either resistance or nominal compliance.

The Study Team is of the view that no assessor employed by an accredited institution should be required to become a registered assessor. Registration should be required only when assessors are not covered by an accredited provider, such as in non-accredited workplaces and assessment centres.

Relationships among ETQAs

The Study Team was keen to simplify the relationships among the ETQAs, to cut back on the number of overlaps between ETQAs, and to ensure that providers were not faced with an excessive number of ETQAs to deal with. This proved very difficult to achieve due to the complexity of the quality assurance structure and the number of ETQAs involved. The model in use accepts that there would be some duplication in the award of standards and qualifications and that there would be considerable overlaps between ETQAs.

SAQA has suggested that duplication of functions and activities at operational level could be minimised by a combination of structured relationships and practices. SAQA's organising principle is that a provider is accredited by one ETQA on the basis of primary focus. They assert that the multiplicity of relations between ETQAs would not impact on the provider since the accrediting primary focus ETQA would take the responsibility for organising the necessary evaluations and even site visits with all relevant parties.⁽²⁵⁾

From the number of critical comments on these arrangements received by the Study Team, the impact of the multiplicity of ETQAs appears to be greater than SAQA anticipated. It can only grow greater still.

Without radically reducing the number of ETQAs involved in the process it is difficult to know how to cut through the confusion. Part of the problem may lie in the enabling language used by SAQA in its criteria and guidelines. It tends to offer a range of alternatives for providers and ETQAs, which may seem commendably flexible but adds to the layers of confusion and uncertainty.

To achieve the desired degree of simplicity and clarity for the education and training provider, the Study Team recommends that a degree of prescription be introduced. We endorse the SAQA principle that a provider seeking accreditation should go to one quality assurance body only and that this would be dependent on the NQF level and the scope of activity they were seeking accreditation for. For multi-purpose providers, that is those offering programmes covering a number of NQF sub-fields or fields, the co-ordinating accrediting body would be the band ETQA for the highest NQF level being sought. A single-purpose provider would be accredited by the SETA ETQA that is responsible for the setting of the standards or qualifications in the scope of activity being sought.

For example, a multi-purpose provider such as a university or technikon seeking accreditation for a number of fields of study up to NQF Level 8 (or 10) would seek accreditation through the CHE. A technical college or private provider seeking accreditation for a number of fields of study up to level 4 would seek accreditation through GENFETQA. Similar multi-purpose providers seeking accreditation up to NQF level 6 would seek accreditation through the CHE. A provider seeking accreditation in one sub-field of activity only would approach the relevant SETA responsible for the particular standards and qualifications.

It is likely that even a single-purpose provider would have included in its scope of activity unit standards outside the main area of activity. For example a provider offering training in Horticulture would possibly include Communication, Computing and Management standards within its programmes. While the ETQA granting accreditation would be the Primary Agriculture ETQA they would need to ensure that any requirements of the standards setting bodies responsible for Management, Communication and Computing were satisfied. This could be arranged through a service level agreement between the ETQAs or through an extension of the ETQA's own accreditation. The latter is encouraged by SAQA in its guidelines but appears not to be very well known. SAQA could play a co-ordinating role to achieve this.

In the case of multi-purpose providers, the CHE or GENFETQA would need to ensure that SETAs (a representative of a consortium of SETAs would be most appropriate) and professional bodies were included where relevant in the accreditation process. The key ETQA would pull together a multi-disciplinary team as appropriate for the scope of activity, the NQF level sought, and the nature of the accreditation audit process.

These proposals refer only to the accreditation functions (including audit) of an ETQA and essentially endorse the current SAQA policy which is succinctly set out in the "Model for Quality Assurance in the HET Band".⁽²⁶⁾

It is possible to clarify responsibilities further by function and this might take some of the heat out of the subject. For example, it would be preferable if the ETQAs that are also standards setting bodies take responsibility for the moderation of their own standards, for the registration of assessors within their sector, and for the jurisdiction over the issuing of awards for learning achievement to constituent learners. The issuing of certificates of accreditation to constituent providers would be the responsibility of the primary focus ETQA. In this way the band ETQA could take responsibility for accrediting a provider (but include other relevant ETQAs in the process), and the relevant SETAs could take responsibility for moderation, registration of assessors and certification of awards within their own defined skills sectors. Professional bodies could also be designated the responsible body for some of these functions as appropriate.

Consideration should be given to limiting ETQA status to bodies established by statute. This shows no disrespect to non-statutory professional bodies with long experience of assessment and quality assurance within their occupational groups. They would associate themselves with the appropriate band or sector ETQA. Unless a strict rule is applied there is in principle no limit to the number of claimants for ETQA status and no clear grounds on which to prevent the number from increasing inexorably. Further expansion of the number would make a very difficult situation intolerable and unworkable. Many respondents claim that the situation has already reached that point.

The Study Team proposes that no more ETQAs should be accredited and an immediate moratorium on applications be applied. Specifically the "Social Sector" category of ETQAs, which is currently unpopulated, should be cancelled. It is a vague term and the team sees no merit in it. It is not useful to add to the numbers of ETQAs already in existence. All providers of education and training have appropriate ETQAs to apply to, including those in the social sector.

Recommendations

The Study Team recommends that:

1. New standards setting bodies should become

- responsible for the technical quality, consultation, accountability and leadership functions currently undertaken by the National Standards Bodies.

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2. *The National Standards Bodies* should be

- disestablished in a properly phased manner, with care being taken to retain in the NQF system the experience and expertise of NSB members.

3. *The SETAs, Council on Higher Education, Department of Education and Department of Labour* should be

- formally recognised as standards setting bodies for their defined areas of interest; and
- charged with making transitional arrangements for the currently recognised SGBs (which would lose that status), for the work being undertaken under their auspices, and for the retention of SGB members' expertise within the system.

4. *The SETAs* should be recognised as the standards setting bodies for their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 1 to 4 and for unit standards-based qualifications and unit standards in their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 5 and 6.

5. *The CHE* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for NQF levels 7 and 8 and for whole qualifications for NQF levels 5 and 6.

6. *The Department of Education* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for schooling (grades R-12), technical colleges and ABET non-vocational standards and qualifications.

7. *The Department of Labour* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for generic vocational standards.

8. *The Department of Education and Department of Labour* should be

- jointly responsible for the development of Critical Outcomes standards.

9. *The current quality assurance model* should be

- changed to an integrated accreditation model which relies on up front evaluation of a provider's capability to provide high quality education and training leading to the award of NQF credits for a particular scope of activity; the ongoing monitoring of provider activities; self-evaluation by providers; and quality audit; and
- SAQA and the ETQAs should reach an agreement on a set of common quality assurance standards and criteria that would make up the Quality Standards for Accredited Education and Training Providers so as to ensure consistency across ETQAs for provider accreditation.

10. *In principle a provider* should

- go through one ETQA only for accreditation, depending on the NQF level and the scope of activity.

11. *The quality assurance body for a multi-purpose provider* should be

- the band ETQA for the highest NQF level being sought.

12. *The quality assurance body for a single-purpose provider* should be

- the ETQA responsible for the setting of the standards or the band ETQA where the standards setter is not also an ETQA.

13. *The definition of a private institution in the FET and HE Acts* should be

- amended to bring consistency between the two Acts;
- amended to include providers offering programmes for national standards and qualifications of less than 120 credits; and
- amended to exclude workplace providers unless they offer programmes for a fee to the public at large, thus removing workplaces from the requirement to seek registration.

14. Registration as assessors should not be

- required of individuals employed by an accredited institution or accredited workplace provider and the requirement should be amended accordingly.

15. Large workplace providers should be

- required to seek accreditation by the relevant ETQA.

16. Small and medium workplace providers should be

- required to use registered assessors to award credit for standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.

17. The ETQA responsible for the setting of standards/qualifications within its designated area of interest should be

- responsible for moderation, the registration of assessors, and jurisdiction over the issuing of certificates of award and achievement should be undertaken by.

18. Provider accreditation should be

- defined to reflect what the status means in relation to the NQF.

19. The number of ETQAs should be limited by

- declaring a moratorium on further applications;
- accrediting no additional ETQAs;
- cancelling the category of Social Sector ETQAs; and
- giving consideration to confining ETQA status to bodies established by statute.

Endnotes

- (1) SGB figure kindly provided by Joe Samuels, Director: Standard Setting and Development, SAQA, 26 February 2002.
- (2) SAQA, "Accreditation status report February/March 2002", at <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nqaf/docs/status.htm>.
- (3) SAQA, ETQA Regulations, reg. 18, 19.
- (4) Gary Granville, *Setting Standards in South Africa. Final Report to SAQA: Directorate for Standards Setting and Development* (December 2001) [unpublished], p. 19. This report was kindly made available to the Study Team with the consent of the SAQA Executive Officer and Director: Standard Setting and Development.
- (5) Based on information kindly provided by Joe Samuels, Director: Standard Setting and Development, 26-28 February 2002; SAQA submission to the Study Team, July 2001.
- (6) SAQA, *International Benchmarking Project on Competency Standards: Report of the South African Qualifications Authority on the National Qualifications Framework*, p.13 [Pretoria, n.d.]; Study Team consultation with NSB Chairpersons, 9 January 2002; MC Mehl, Chairperson, NSB 10, "NSB 10 Proposal: Dealing with Inter-Disciplinary Areas," (22 November 2001).
- (7) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for the Registration of Assessors*, ([Pretoria], 2001). In practice, applicants to DoE for registration as a private HE institution are required to submit a simultaneous application to the HEQC for accreditation. The application for registration proceeds if provisional accreditation is granted. The DoE has not yet registered private FET institutions as the process for doing so is still in preparation. For further details see below and Appendix D.
- (8) Department of Labour/Department of Education, *Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa: A Nation at Work for a Better Life for All*. ([Pretoria], n.d.), p. 37.
- (9) For registration provisions, see Higher Education Act, 1997, chapter 7, and FET Act, 1998, chapter 5 and section 51.
- (10) CHE, *New Academic Policy...Discussion Document* (December 2001).
- (11) Gary Granville, *Setting Standards in South Africa*, p. 19.
- (12) The Study Team notes that the Mining SETA (Mining Qualifications Authority) from the outset has been expected to undertake standards setting responsibilities under its own statute, the Mine Health and Safety Act, 1996, s. 46(1)(a).
- (13) Under the auspices of the Industry Training Federation (a permanent body established by the Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) in New Zealand, similar to SETAs) four ITOs have co-operated in the design of unit standards for total production management. Others have co-operated to develop occupational health and safety standards. In each case one of the member ITOs is designated the Responsible Body and takes responsibility for the maintenance of the standards and the quality assurance aspects.
- (14) Section 5 of the GENFETQA Act, 2001 makes the body "responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications" for GET and FET. However we understand that this provision was a late drafting error and is to be repealed. In the light of the Study Team's proposals a modification rather than repeal might be indicated.
- (15) "Harmonising Approaches to Qualifications, Registration and Licensing in the Professions: Discussion Document Prepared by ECSA," ([Johannesburg, Draft 1: March 2000), p. 3.

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- (16) J Samuels, "The Relationship between Qualifications, Registration and Licensing," *SAQA Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 2000), p. 30; South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) submission to Study Team, [October 2001].
- (17) J Samuels, "The Relationship between Qualifications, Registration and Licensing," p. 30; Engineering Council of South Africa submission to the Study Team, 5 October 2001.
- (18) "Harmonising Approaches to Qualifications, Registration and Licensing," p. 2.
- (19) Hu Hanrahan, "A Nationally Integrated Model for Qualifications, Registration and Licencing in the Engineering Profession," presented at the 22nd Annual SA Engineering Education Conference, 10 October 2000, at <http://shannon.ee.wits.ac.za/~ecsa/notesQRLEdCon.doc>. The criticism was made by SAICA, submission to the Study Team, [October 2001].
- (20) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*, [Pretoria, n.d.], p 5.
- (21) Australian National Training Authority, *Guide to Good Practice in Australian Quality Training Framework Auditing* (7 January 2001), p.1, at <http://www.anta.gov.au/publication.asp?qslD=85%20>.
- (22) ETQA Regulations, reg. 1; SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*, p. 29.
- (23) SAQA, *Guidelines for Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies: Procedures for the Monitoring and Auditing of ETQAs* (Pretoria, 2001).
- (24) ETQA Regulations, reg. 16.
- (25) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*, p 15.
- (26) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*, Addendum, p 29.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Introduction

The Study Team's view is that responsibility for leadership of the NQF sits squarely with the Departments of Education and Labour, working closely with SAQA. This chapter sets out a proposal for institutionalising these arrangements.

SAQA is charged by its Act with the oversight of the NQF and must remain the lead agency in implementing NQF strategy. It is important to consider the most appropriate arrangements both for the governance of SAQA and for the involvement of stakeholders in determining the direction of NQF implementation.

Leadership responsibilities extend beyond the Departments of Education and Labour and SAQA. Chapter 7 proposes significant additional leadership roles for the CHE, the SETAs and GENFETQA. The future success of NQF implementation will rest in no small measure on the ability of these bodies to initiate change and build capacity in their respective sectors. While accountable under their respective laws and the SAQA Act, 1995 they should have some freedom to determine how NQF objectives are to be interpreted and applied.

Many respondents stressed the importance of advocacy, that is, the widespread public promotion of the NQF. The Study Team believes that advocacy is an aspect of leadership and is not the responsibility of SAQA alone. Advocacy begins with the Ministers of Education and Labour. Clear and ongoing political sponsorship is essential. The two Departments and the ETQAs (together with their associated standards setting teams or groups) have distinctive roles to play in explaining to stakeholders and users the features and potential benefits of the NQF as it evolves over the next few years.

The legislative mandate

SAQA is charged with the responsibility to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. The Authority currently comprises 30 members appointed by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour. It has a mandate to formulate policy and criteria for the registration of standards setting bodies and the accreditation of ETQAs, to register and accredit such bodies, and to register national standards and qualifications on the NQF.⁽¹⁾

In carrying out these objectives the Authority acts in consultation with the Departments of Education and Labour, through their representation in the Authority and otherwise. It consults its sub-structures (the standards setting and quality assurance bodies) and the provider community through their representative bodies, and it undertakes both narrow and broad consultation with stakeholders across the country and invites the views of the public at large.

Locus of policy authority

The Department of Education argues strongly in its submission to the Study Team that "the prerogative to make policies should be exercised by the Minister [of Education] in the first place". The implication is that there is confusion over the Minister's and SAQA's respective roles in policy formulation. If that is so it is regrettable. The confusion must be brought to an end so that the development and execution of a coherent NQF implementation strategy is not impeded.

It is a truism that Cabinet Ministers, on behalf of the government, exercise policy authority over their portfolios. There ought to be no doubt that ultimate policy authority with respect to the NQF in terms of the SAQA Act, 1995 rests with the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour. Each Minister is given direction in policy matters by a range of other Acts. The Minister of Education determines policy subject to the provisions of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (with respect to education below the Higher Education band), the South African Schools Act, 1996, the HE Act, 1997, the FET Act, 1998, the ABET Act, 2000 and the GENFETQA Act, 2001 among others. In the area of training the Minister of Labour exercises his policy authority through the Skills Development Act, 1998 and the Skills Development Levies Act, 1999.

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In the case of the NQF, both Ministers have large responsibilities under the SAQA Act, 1995. In consultation, they appoint the Chairperson of the Authority and its members (including making six appointments at their own discretion). They determine the terms of office of members, which may not exceed three years. They approve the appointment of the Executive Officer. They are advised by the Authority "on matters affecting the registration of standards and qualifications". They may assign any relevant function to the Authority. They approve the Authority's regulations in terms of the Act. They receive the Authority's annual report and table it in Parliament. The Minister of Education is empowered to establish the NQF itself. In the light of these provisions it cannot be said that the Ministers are absent from the affairs of the Authority, or that the Authority is anything but subordinate to the Ministers, subject to the provisions of the Act.⁽²⁾

The current status and role of the two Departments with respect to the Authority is as follows:

- Both Departments are represented on the Authority by senior officials nominated by their Directors-General. (The provincial heads of department are also represented by one of their number.) In the case of Education the representative is a Deputy Director-General, in the case of Labour a Chief Director.
- These officials or those they designate represent their respective departments on the SAQA Executive Committee.
- Quarterly meetings are held between the Minister, his senior officials and the SAQA Executive Committee (including the senior staff of SAQA, if necessary).
- All internal policy documents of the Authority and business plans are submitted for the Ministers' approval. Annual budgets are submitted to the Minister of Education.

SAQA's view is that these arrangements ensure the Departments' close involvement in the strategy and policy for the development and implementation of the NQF, and in fact afford the departments the opportunity to exercise strategic and policy leadership. The representation of the departments on the Authority and Executive Committee and the quarterly meetings indicate that the departments are not "just stakeholders" but have the status corresponding to their Ministers' portfolio responsibilities with respect to the NQF. Nevertheless, a strong perception remains that these arrangements have not enabled the departments to provide effective strategic leadership.

The DoE drew specific attention to two matters that caused it discomfort: the respective policy authority of the Minister and SAQA, and SAQA's power to initiate regulations for the Minister's approval (in consultation with the Minister of Labour). The former derives from the duty placed on SAQA "to formulate and publish policies and criteria for...the registration of bodies responsible for establishing education and training and standards or qualifications," and "the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of such standards" (section 5(1)). This is the only policy mandate given to SAQA in the Act and it is circumscribed. It is arguable that SAQA's duty to "oversee" the development and implementation of the NQF is inherently vague and thus capable of being exercised in an expansive manner. However, "oversight" is an executive function, and in any case the Authority is bound to advise the Minister on matters relating to it. The second question, relating to who initiates regulations, is largely a matter of convention. The normal convention applied to statutory bodies is that the Minister determines regulations on the advice of the statutory body. In the case of the SAQA Act it is the Authority that is empowered to "make regulations" (section 14). In either case only the Minister has the power to approve the regulations, which have the force of law under the respective Acts.

The Study Team concludes that the problems to which the DoE draws attention have more to do with subjective factors than the objective letter of the law, which in any case is a law in the portfolio of the Minister of Education, introduced to Parliament by the Minister of Education with the support of the Minister of Labour. There is little doubt, from the consultations the Study Team conducted with the senior officials of the DoE, that the Department feels there is something seriously amiss in the lines of authority. It feels strangely disfranchised from its own oversight role, and considers that the prerogatives of the Minister have been or are in danger of being impaired by the manner in which the NQF is being implemented by SAQA and its substructures. The fact that all the accredited economic sector ETQAs fall outside the portfolio responsibility of the Minister of Education yet are capable of taking actions that impact directly on institutions in the Minister's portfolio, may have something to do with the DoE's discomfort.

The Study Team is not inclined to probe too deeply into the history and present dynamics of the relationship between DoE and SAQA. The team points out that relatively little information came its way on the relationship between DoL and SAQA, so there is no basis for comparisons. On the face of it, it appears that the full scope of Ministerial and departmental involvement in the implementation of the NQF has not been exercised, but we do not wish to speculate on the reasons. In fairness we should note that SAQA has come in for some heavy criticism on the grounds of lack of leadership, but we did not encounter a great deal of self-criticism in the submissions of the state departments that have overall responsibility.

The important thing for the team is that a serious problem exists. Both sides acknowledge it. It is a matter of tremendous concern to all other major players in the NQF implementation, who plead for direction. Fortunately, even during the course of the team's work the relationship between the DoE and SAQA has improved, perhaps partly because several problems were brought to the surface when the departments responded to the Study Team's terms of reference.

SAQA's governance arrangements must be examined in the light of the fact that the NQF is a priority programme of the national government. There is abundant evidence before the Study Team to indicate that serious steps must be taken to exert overall strategic leadership of the implementation process. It is therefore imperative to consider an approach to governance that will affirm the government's leadership, enable SAQA to exercise the full scope of executive action befitting a statutory body (but under clear direction), and bring about faster and more effective implementation.

Issues relating to leadership and governance

Respondents express considerable dissatisfaction with the performance of the SAQA Board, most of it couched in general terms. The tenor of many submissions is that the Board's structure, being based largely on provider and stakeholder nominations, virtually compels it to spend an excessive amount of time achieving consensus among different interests.

The team notes that SAQA might influence its own environment but cannot control it. A large number of bodies have been created under the new Education and Labour legislation. They have multiple functions of which only some relate directly to SAQA. The Authority has attempted to clarify lines of responsibility through its regulations and executive actions but has not been able to prevent territorial disputes. Thus it has been compelled to play the role of mediator, while attempting to assert a unifying vision for all bodies engaged in NQF implementation. Inevitably the Authority has not always proved popular with the parties it has tried to reconcile.

As for the DoE and DoL, the Study Team agrees that it is inappropriate to regard them as stakeholders. They are principals who have responsibility for their Ministers' policy execution, including the implementation of the NQF. They should ensure that there is coherence in the NQF both in legislation and practice. In order to create the enabling conditions for implementation the co-ordination between the relevant government departments and SAQA is crucial.

It is only through co-ordination that the Ministers' political intentions can be channeled and bureaucratic efforts can be focused, so that resources are brought to bear on rapid delivery of the benefits of the NQF to the society at large. However, co-ordination should not mean that SAQA has no decision-making scope of its own. It needs the space to determine appropriate ways and means to fulfil its functions under the SAQA Act.

Thus there are two issues that must be resolved: the relationship of the two state departments to the Authority, and the composition of the Authority.

Restructuring proposals

NQF Strategic Partnership

A structure is needed that will comprise the senior executives of the DoE, DoL and SAQA. The Study Team proposes the establishment of the NQF Strategic Partnership, which should serve the following functions:

- to develop a National Plan for the coordination and implementation of the various components of the NQF

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- across departments, structures and institutions;
- to promote alignment of the NQF with the government's HRD Strategy;
- to facilitate communication among partners and stakeholders;
- to review Joint Implementation Plans between the partners;
- to ensure follow-up and monitoring of strategy;
- to advise on research and development initiatives consistent with the NQF goals;
- to consider and advise Ministers on SAQA's annual business plan and budget; and
- to facilitate the funding of SAQA.

The Partnership arrangement confirms the leadership of the strategic partners, consolidates the policy-making process, integrates the planning function, and thus eliminates the void that encouraged jurisdictional dispute and strategic drift. Above all, it enables the two Departments to exert leadership in the NQF in collaboration with SAQA. The team recommends that the NQF Strategic Partnership should maintain a consultative relationship on strategic issues with SAQA's sub-structures.

To set the authority of this body beyond doubt we propose that the NQF Strategic Partnership be established by amendment to the SAQA Act, 1996. It should meet at least bi-monthly, chaired by agreement between the two Directors-General. SAQA should provide the secretariat.

NQF Forum

Stakeholder participation has been etched in the democratic psyche of a large segment of the South African society and for that reason should be maintained and fostered by appropriate means. Stakeholder participation in the NQF is essential as our proposals for standards setting indicate. In our view, there is need for a regular high status national forum to enable all interested bodies (including providers) to engage each other and the Strategic Partnership on the development of the NQF. This should become a dynamic occasion in the policy formulation, implementation and monitoring cycle.

The forum should take the form of an annual conference between the Ministers, departments, stakeholders, providers and SAQA. This would serve the purposes of democratic practice, transparency and accountability. The major functions of the NQF Forum should be:

- to foster interaction between NQF stakeholders and the Departments of Education and Labour;
- to enable stakeholders to express their views on the NQF National Plan formulated by the Strategic Partnership;
- to provide feedback on the impact of the NQF;
- to provide critique on SAQA's annual report; and
- to provide a forum for public advocacy of the NQF.

Composition of the Authority

The DoE's submission suggests that the Authority needs to give clear and efficient leadership in the cause of "systematic national transformation", without "having to pursue the fragmentary and sectoral interests of stakeholders".

The past and present members of SAQA would probably agree that during the formative years it was necessary to have a broad-based and representative Authority to ensure input from the various constituencies with an interest in the NQF. Despite the criticism, much has been accomplished during this transitional phase. The Study Team briefly considered the view that the Authority was insufficiently representative, since the Act was passed before the NSA, the SETAs, the CHE and GENFETQA were brought into existence. But merely to state the possibility of increasing the size of the Authority on those grounds is to reject it, since there is no end to the list of other possible claimants. SAQA might gain in expertise but it would lose in focus and manageability. The dominant view is that the Authority is already oversized.

The Study Team, informed by the advice we were given, is strongly of the view that the membership of the Authority should be considerably smaller, no more than 15 including the Chairperson and Executive Officer. It should reflect South African norms of representivity, comprise knowledgeable persons, specialists and experienced

practitioners broadly representing the bands and functional areas of the NQF, with a blend of the skills required to govern the affairs of this major national public enterprise. Such a membership would greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority. It would also be consistent with much international practice.

We envisage that the Ministers would invite the public, stakeholders and providers to nominate persons for membership of the Authority. Members would be appointed as at present, by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour, against criteria that would enable the Authority to achieve national recognition and credibility, for example:

- commitment to the reconstruction and development of South Africa;
- commitment to the NQF objectives;
- knowledge of education and training in GET, FET and HET, and labour market related skills development;
- knowledge of standards setting, qualifications and quality assurance processes;
- experience in governance; and
- personal integrity and standing in society.

The Ministers would ensure that principles of competence, expertise, experience, representivity, equity and redress were observed in the composition of the Authority, taken as a whole.

The new Authority members would not carry mandates from constituencies but make themselves cognisant of and responsive to the needs of stakeholders.

The DoE and DoL should not be members of the Authority, but should be in attendance at meetings of the Authority and Executive Committee. In that capacity the officials would be in a position to be informed and also to give advice. Their leadership role would be exercised through the NQF Strategic Partnership and the advice they provide to their Ministers.

Working relations

With clear lines of responsibility and accountability, a Strategic Partnership in place, and a small, focused Board, SAQA should enjoy a high level of executive autonomy in undertaking its functions. The relationship with the two Ministries and Departments should be based on trust and confidence.

Practically, the relationship should work as follows. SAQA's annual business plan would reflect the joint interests of the principals (DoE, DoL and SAQA). It would be developed by SAQA in consultation with the two departments, ensuring consistency with government policy, regulations and priorities. It would play its part in carrying forward the NQF National Plan. Meetings between SAQA's senior management and senior officials from the DoE and DoL would take place regularly through the NQF Strategic Partnership. They would keep SAQA attuned to the thinking of the Departments and *vice versa*. The Partnership would help resolve tensions between the priorities of the two departments and align the thinking of the principals.

Legislative amendments

At several points in this report, not least in this chapter, the Study Team has drawn attention to deficiencies in the legislative framework of the NQF. That framework extends well beyond the SAQA Act, 1995 itself, as the working paper at Appendix D makes clear. On the whole it amounts to an impressive reinforcement for the objectives of the NQF, but some provisions in the laws are vague or ambiguous, some overlap, some are inconsistent with others, and some have been overtaken by events. Many of the Study Team's proposals would require legislative amendment to become effective.

The Study Team therefore proposes that a review and revision of the NQF legislative framework be undertaken on a fully consultative basis as soon as the government has determined its response to this report.

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Recommendations

The Study Team recommends that:

1. The NQF Strategic Partnership should be

- established in law, to comprise the senior executives of the Department of Education, the Department of Labour and SAQA, to ensure clear strategic leadership of NQF implementation, to approve and monitor the National Plan on NQF Implementation, and to resolve differences.

2. The NQF Forum should be

- established to meet at least annually to exchange experience, review progress and advise the Strategic Partnership on the implementation of the NQF.

3. The SAQA Board should be

- reconstituted, to comprise not more than 15 members, appointed after public nominations by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour, against clear criteria to be specified in the Act.

4. The NQF legislative framework should be

- reviewed and revised as soon as government has determined its response to this report.

Endnotes

(1) SAQA Act, 1995, sections 4, 5.

(2) SAQA Act, 1995, sections 1, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14. See also Appendix D.

RESOURCING THE NQF: FUNDS AND CAPACITY

Introduction

When the first democratic government embarked on the NQF project, the re-organisation of government under the interim Constitution had barely commenced. The budget system was in transition. Education was in the frontline of the political transformation and the government was committed to make decisive moves to break the stranglehold of apartheid ideology and institutions. The NQF was a major RDP commitment and its enactment into law was never in doubt. Amid all the pressures of political and bureaucratic change, the sponsoring departments were not required to estimate in detail what resources the NQF would require over time. In fact it would have been impossible for them to do so. The decision had been taken to pass an enabling Act and leave development and implementation to the new Authority.

However, preparatory work on the concepts and institutional architecture proceeded through several consultative structures led by the Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF. The committee went beyond its brief to consider what infrastructure and support the new Authority would require. Its proposals showed insight into what was in store for government decision-makers:

“The SAQA Board form an Establishment Unit (EU), in order to assist the Board in operationalising an infrastructure for SAQA. Such a unit should have expertise to create a decentralised, innovative, efficient and effective structure, and would include, among others, experts in organisation development, financial, management, information technology, and education and training system.

“The recommendation on the structure of SAQA reflect the necessities arising from the growth of the NQF....

“The national Government proactively takes up its responsibility for the establishment of SAQA and related structures by making the necessary budget provisions. Funding for areas such as those mentioned above must be sufficient to ensure that the NQF is able to function effectively.

“The budgetary implications of establishing and maintaining the NQF, at national and provincial level, be determined by the Establishment Unit...,

“Funding for SAQA and related structures should also take account of staff development for education and training personnel in respect of capacity to implement the NQF.

“Funding for SAQA and related structures should not be dedicated exclusively to SAQA. In many cases it will be more efficient and effective to have such moneys as a part of budget appropriations of the Departments of Education and Labour as well as any other relevant government departments.

“Programmes for capacity building which will allow sectors and provinces to build the NQF, be identified and project plans and budgets be drawn up and approved for such programmes.”⁽¹⁾

Six years hence, with so much development work already done, this is still a remarkably apt agenda. Submissions to the Study Team echoed most of the same points. SAQA's presentation to the Study Team cited “resource uncertainty” as a current weakness and a future threat to the fulfilment of its mission.

The implementation of a National Qualifications Framework is a very large undertaking. As our terms of reference indicate, the sponsoring departments are aware that the government has not yet come to grips with the resource implications of this flagship project. Our report provides a new opportunity to engage with the issues and resolve them.

Chapter 9

In this chapter we consider the resource requirements of NQF implementation primarily in relation to the responsibilities of SAQA and its sub-structures, the NSBs/SGBs and the ETQAs, and the broad resource implications of our own proposals.⁽²⁾

Responsibility for funding in the current NQF system

The division of responsibility for funding the bodies that make up the SAQA system is by no means straightforward. This is because the role given to the Authority by the Act is supervisory. Admittedly SAQA's oversight is pro-active, and it has vital developmental and decision-making functions. But the business end of NQF implementation is the responsibility of a range of temporary stakeholder bodies (in the case of standards setting) and a large number of statutory bodies and professional bodies (in the case of quality assurance). There are some exceptions, but SAQA does not control and may not have much practical influence over the funding of these bodies.

SAQA

The SAQA Act, 1995 provides that SAQA's funds will comprise Parliamentary grants and moneys raised by the Authority by way of loans (with government approval), gifts, interest on investments and fees. SAQA must use its funds to undertake its functions, which are restricted to oversight of the development and implementation of the NQF and the provision of advice to the Minister. What has happened in practice will be discussed below.⁽³⁾

National Standards Bodies (NSBs)

The twelve NSBs are appointed and registered by SAQA in cycles of three years. Their task is to help bring SGBs into existence in their respective fields and stimulate the generation of appropriate standards and qualifications. According to the NSB Regulations, 1998 they "form an integral part of the Authority". They are neither corporate entities nor are their members employed by SAQA. Instead they function as an honorary corps of senior volunteers, receiving reimbursement for expenses but being paid attendance fees for meetings only at SAQA's discretion. SAQA supports the NSBs' work programme on the basis of an approved annual business plan and budget, and provides them with professional, logistical and administrative support from the SAQA office.⁽⁴⁾

Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs)

SGBs may be recognised or established by NSBs, and are registered by them for periods not exceeding three years to generate standards in their designated sub-fields. When they have done the job they must dissolve. Since SGBs are stakeholder-based bodies they are expected to be self-funded and financially competent. If this proves not to be the case, SAQA must fund "agreed activities" of a financially strapped SGB if it is able to do so⁽⁵⁾

SAQA secured start-up funding from the EU for up to 100 SGBs to operate in identified priority and under-resourced fields, and assistance from DANIDA for seven in the Education, Training and Development field. The funds were available for the period 1999-2001 at up to R31 603 per SGB, and could be applied against approved business plans to a full range of activities from initiation through capacity building to standards writing. Extremely strict rules of disbursement applied.⁽⁶⁾

Among the 106 currently registered SGBs there are bound to be significant disparities in sponsorship, funding and output. With a view to transparency and improved efficiency, SAQA has launched an investigation to find out which of the registered SGBs is in operation, who is funding them, how the funds are being spent and what standards they have generated.

Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)

ETQAs are organisations (or groups of organisations) that are accredited by SAQA for cycles of three years. A condition of accreditation as an ETQA is that an organisation has "sufficient resources to be viable for the duration of the period of accreditation". Thus SAQA has no financial responsibility for ETQAs. SAQA's *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* indicate how an ETQA is to demonstrate its financial competence to handle quality assurance

across all the providers in its sector. It must submit a five-year business plan giving evidence of financial planning, financial viability, an income-generating strategy, and the charges that the ETQA could raise or waive. Several applications have been turned down for failure to comply.⁽⁷⁾

All 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) have newly-accredited ETQAs. They are funded by their SETAs which are themselves funded by mandatory employer levies, moneys paid by the National Skills Fund, income from services rendered or other sources.⁽⁸⁾

The professional body ETQAs are funded entirely by their own organisations through fees levied on members and aspiring members.⁽⁹⁾

Band ETQAs are funded in terms of their Acts:

- The HEQC is a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) whose funding sources are Parliamentary grants, donations, and payments for services rendered by the CHE or the HEQC.
- The GENFETQA's funding sources are similar to the HEQC's.⁽¹⁰⁾

All ETQAs (except for the professional bodies) are newly-established. They are still in the process of becoming equipped to undertake their statutory role of quality assuring learning achievements in their respective spheres of primary interest. It is too early to make useful comparisons of funding patterns among the ETQAs, but given differences in governance, funding sources and clientele there is likely to be significant variation across the ETQAs in the funds made available for quality assurance and the ways they are spent. In their verbal submission to the Study Team, the CHE/HEQC executive officers emphasised that the CHE (like SAQA) received a wholly inadequate DoE grant and had been compelled to seek extensive donor support.

Scale and structure of the SAQA budget

Expenditure

In the first four years (1997/98 to 2000/2001) SAQA's actual operating expenses increased from R3.0 million to R28.2 million. Its budgeted expenditure in 2001/2002 was R36.8 million and the approved budget for 2002/2003 is R42.5 million. SAQA's business plan projects an increase in estimated expenditure to R57.8 million by 2006/2007.⁽¹¹⁾

SAQA's budget is not prepared in terms of programmes or functions but simply according to line items, grouped in three categories as personnel costs, administrative costs and capital expenditure. Until now SAQA has operated a highly centralised form of budget management. The Authority's financial statements reflect this, since all figures are aggregated and there is no cost or revenue breakdown by directorate. In fact directorates will become cost centres only from the beginning of the 2002/2003 financial year. SAQA's published documents do not permit a functional analysis of past budgets and it is not possible to analyse with any accuracy how much it spends on standards setting, quality assurance, the NLRD or support functions respectively.

With that proviso a few simple observations may be made about the order of magnitude of the main categories of expenditure:

- Estimated personnel costs amount to about 35 per cent of total estimated expenditure in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003.
- Estimated administrative costs amount to 62 per cent of total estimated expenditure in 2001/2002 and slightly less in 2002/2003, but the designation "administrative" is somewhat misleading because it includes virtually all non-personnel expenditure in support of the development and implementation of the NQF.
- Estimated capital costs amount to 2.9 per cent of total estimated expenditure in 2001/2002 and 4.2 per cent in 2002/2003.
- Within the administrative costs category the largest item is transport, subsistence and accommodation, which accounts for about 20 per cent of all SAQA's estimated expenditure in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003, followed by professional and consulting fees, which accounts for a further 16-17 per cent of the total.
- The largest single item of expenditure in functional terms is SAQA's financial support to NSB operations. This is charged against the transport, subsistence and accommodation budget item.⁽¹²⁾

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Revenue

The Department of Education granted SAQA R5.8 million in the first two years of SAQA's existence and the grant has remained constant at R6 million since then. The grant represents 16.3 per cent (or one-sixth) of SAQA's total estimated expenditure in 2001/2002 and 14.1 per cent of the estimated total in 2002/2003. DoE and the National Treasury have approved an additional R3m capital grant in the 2002/2003 SAQA budget towards the purchase of a new headquarters building.

SAQA has generated a modest amount of fee income: R0.25 million in 1998/99, R3.1 million in 1999/2000 and R1.6 million in 2000/2001. The biggest earner has been the Authority's one-off role in the provisional accreditation of private HE providers, undertaken in connection with the DoE's registration process, although most of this revenue was offset by payments to SERTEC which undertook the bulk of the assessments. The exercise to convert short courses into unit standards brought in registration fees. The only continuing source of fees at present is SAQA's Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Qualifications (CEEQ), which is the national evaluation centre for foreign qualifications. CEEQ's activities yielded R0.6 million in 2000/2001.⁽¹³⁾

SAQA has filled the massive gap between its expenditure requirements and the government grant by raising budgetary support from development co-operation agencies. The European Union has been the biggest provider by far, via a three-year grant of ECU/€ 14 million, starting in 1999/2000, to assist SAQA with the development and implementation of the NQF. These funds have been used to support:

- SAQA's physical infrastructure;
- staff salaries;
- SAQA's information technology;
- NSB and SGB operations including registration of standards and qualifications;
- ETQA accreditation;
- widescale capacity building within SAQA and among the sub-structures and stakeholders;
- SAQA's research capacity;
- SAQA's resource and information centre, and publications; and
- an advocacy campaign.

It is beyond question that the implementation of the NQF has been made possible by European Union funds, whose local value has increased as the exchange value of the Rand has declined. SAQA has budgeted for revenue support of R25.0 million in 2002/2003 from the EU alone. EU funding will terminate at the end of December 2003.⁽¹⁴⁾

Smaller, strategically targeted grants or technical support have been provided over the years by CIDA (Canada), GTZ (Germany), DANIDA (Denmark), USAID, the British Council, NUFFIC (Netherlands), HEDCO (Ireland) and the Ford Foundation.⁽¹⁵⁾

Indispensable and highly valued as donor support has been, SAQA's overwhelming reliance on it to undertake its statutory functions has come at a considerable administrative cost. Donor funds are not casually given or managed. The SAQA staff, principally the Executive Officer, has had to invest significant amounts of time in advocacy, persuasion and negotiation in order to secure commitments from the development co-operation agencies, who have their own policies and priorities to satisfy, and political principals to convince. Securing the donor's support is but the beginning of a complex business relationship between SAQA and the agency. Continuing administrative effort must be invested in order to comply with each agency's distinct demands for business plans, logframes, budgets, progress reports and financial statements. Each agency has its own timelines, so multiple deadlines must be met. Conditions attached to a grant or technical assistance agreement must be observed, visiting missions hosted, disbursement problems followed up, cash flow gaps filled, and all manner of associated details dealt with.

Perhaps the most significant opportunity cost of donor dependence has been the creative time and effort spent by SAQA's Executive Officer on the management of donor relations, which to say the least has complicated the task of strategic leadership and management.

The principal parties in SAQA's funding equation have known for years that the over-reliance on external funding is in principle unsatisfactory, unstable and of limited duration. For whatever reason the government has been unable thus far to commit itself to fill the breach. With the closure of the EU grant looming, the Authority's attention turned to the only other potential revenue source, which is self-generated income.

The SAQA income generating strategy

During 1999/2000 SAQA decided to investigate how to become self-sufficient through an income generation strategy, based on section 10(5) of the SAQA Act, 1995, which empowers the Authority to

“charge or waive fees-

- a. for the granting of any registration or accreditation; and
- b. for any services provided by the Authority.”⁽¹⁶⁾

The consulting firm Perry and Associates was commissioned to undertake the task and to prepare an associated marketing strategy. SAQA's brief laid emphasis on the social importance and complexity of the Authority's mandate and the need to take seriously the effects of self-funding on its constituents. The consultants carried out a stakeholder survey to determine the market perception of SAQA and identify strategic issues to be taken into account. They also analysed the factors considered imperative for a self-funding strategy: SAQA's customers, products, image and communication, and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The consultants advised that SAQA had two potentially marketable products:

- accreditation, which was considered to be the core income-generating activity; and
- information, particularly based on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

Since standards were freely available worldwide they were not recommended as a marketable commodity. SAQA was advised to reposition itself among its core stakeholders by emphasising what had already been achieved, and to launch a broad-based branding and awareness campaign emphasising the social and personal benefits of quality education and training. The campaign would be a prelude to communicating the intended commercialisation of some of SAQA's products and services. Based on a choice of pricing options and assumptions about demand, the consultants prepared a funding model that could be expected to yield R24.8 million in year 1 (2001/2002) and R40.1 million in year 4 (2004/2005).⁽¹⁷⁾

SAQA communicated the findings of this study to the Ministers of Education and Labour. The DoE and DoL representatives on the Authority expressed concern at the probable knock-on effects of the income generating strategy and advised that SAQA should undertake further work on it. They proposed that a costing model for education and training should be developed that would enable an assessment to be made of the strategy's likely impact on the system. SAQA appointed an expert team headed by the Chairperson of the Authority's Finance Committee to prepare the costing framework. It immediately advised the Authority to seek an indication of Ministerial views on the principle of the funding strategy, and to consult the education and training community in the GET, FET and HET bands. These actions were taken between April-July 2001.

The letter to the Ministers emphasised that all NQF stakeholders believed that their efforts were contributing to the transformation of the education and training system but such work was not cost free. SAQA's budgetary requirement amounted to one-half of one per cent of the total estimated annual cost (R75 billion) of all education and training in the country, including skills development. Funding could come from only two possible sources, the government or the learners, directly or indirectly. SAQA much preferred the former option. However, if that were not possible the Authority would have to divert some of its efforts into mounting the income generating strategy in the most responsible way.

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SAQA's modified version of the consultants' proposals comprises compulsory charges and income from the sale of products, as follows:

<i>Compulsory charges to clients</i>	
1 231 000 FET and GET certificates @ R10 per certificate	R12.3 million
40 ETQA accreditations @ R80 000	R 3.2 million
10 000 provider accreditations @ R600	R 6.0 million
<i>Additional income</i>	
NLRD records	R 4.5 million
SAQA Magazine	R 0.9 million
Packaged information	R 2.5 million
Total	<u>R29.4 million</u>

SAQA was advised that the question could be resolved only when the Study Team had reported.⁽¹⁸⁾

The Study Team's views

User charges

SAQA's proposed income generating strategy is a counsel of desperation, not conviction. There is a case to be made for some aspects of user charges, but they cannot be the main source of funding for the implementation of the NQF. In principle the NQF is a high profile government programme (widely endorsed by stakeholders and providers) to facilitate the transformation of education and training and the national HRD Strategy. Quality management is inherently costly. It is appropriate that the costs should be shared, but the government is rightly expected to demonstrate its full commitment to the NQF by making available a commensurate share of public funds for its implementation.

The Study Team endorses reasonable user charges by ETQAs for provider accreditation. Such charges should take into account the wide range of providers' circumstances and should not act as a disincentive to full participation in quality management. The evaluation of external qualifications should continue to yield a valuable fee income. We support the sale of SAQA's information products to clients at prices that would not drive learners and employers away from the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). But we see no merit in the proposals for compulsory fee charges suggested in SAQA's income generating strategy.

- Charging learners for their certificates would be excessive and counter-productive. SAFCERT (now GENFETQA) has been wholly dependent on examination fee charges for its revenue. The learners themselves do not pay the fees directly or indirectly. The fees are paid to GENFETQA as a tariff by the provincial education departments on behalf of their learners. If SAQA charged for certificates it would amount to a second tax on the same clients for essentially the same service, which would be unjust. It would require the provincial education departments to find additional money out of their budgetary allocations. If the fiscus were to provide such funds to SAQA there would be a more sensible way to do it, namely through an appropriate DoE grant.
- The idea that SAQA could charge ETQAs an annual fee to be accredited is particularly inappropriate given that almost all if not all ETQAs have been established by statute with a Parliamentary mandate.
- The suggestion that SAQA could charge a fee for provider accreditations appears to be another case of double taxation. The ETQA provides the accreditation service and should be the only body to be paid for it.

Budget process and government responsibility

The resourcing of the NQF has been a problematic matter from the time of SAQA's establishment in 1997. As early as 1996, in the document cited at the beginning of this chapter, the Ministerial Committee on the Implementation of the NQF had urged a proactive approach by the government to the funding of the NQF, consistent with its importance in national development. Given the transitional nature of budget processes in the early years of the first democratic administration and the novelty of the NQF concept, this request was never heeded. It was left to SAQA to make the running by negotiating major EU support.

The government seems to have been content to rely on this welcome cushion and postpone the inevitable day of reckoning. At no time have the two sponsoring state departments undertaken a thorough review of the resource requirements of implementing the National Qualifications Framework. Understandably, they have urged caution on SAQA with respect to the income generating strategy, fearing that it could suppress the very demand for education and training services that state policy is committed to expand and fulfil.

The Study Team has examined SAQA's budget advocacy process in order to understand the government's approach to the funding of the organisation. The process, at least until very recent months, has left much to be desired on all sides. SAQA has adopted a rather formal approach to the matter. Having prepared its budget and sought approval from the Finance Committee and the Board, the budget has been forwarded to the Minister of Education. It has not been strategised in advance with senior officials responsible for budget policy and planning in the Department of Education. Moreover, the National Treasury has never been engaged at a strategic level with respect to the overall priority, cost structure and trajectory of NQF implementation. It appears that the SAQA budget (which is to say, NQF implementation) has lacked informed advocates both within the Department of Education and in the crucial interactions with the Treasury. There are strong indications that the Department of Education is aware of this state of affairs and is anxious to correct it. Since the Minister of Education has portfolio responsibility for the NQF, the question of state funding has been handled entirely in terms of the DoE grant. The possibility of support from the Department of Labour or its associated funds has not yet been seriously examined on a bilateral or trilateral basis.

The Study Team has enquired whether the National Treasury has a standard policy with respect to state funding of statutory bodies. The answer is that there is no such policy. There is ongoing work between the Treasury and the Department of Public Service and Administration on the management of public entities, including remuneration policies and performance management systems, in relation to the implementation of the Public Finance Management Act [PFMA], 1999 (Act No. 1 of 1999).

The Treasury recognises that statutory bodies differ in their mandates and revenue potential. Treasury officials are particularly wary of mandate creep and the associated tendency for statutory bodies to build management bureaucracies. Thus it is important, in the Treasury's view, to adopt a strategic approach to SAQA's budgetary needs, to examine its performance and the value it adds. Such a picture has never been presented to the Treasury. When it is, it might be found that there were compelling reasons for increasing SAQA's budget, especially in view of the termination of donor support and the disincentive effects of fee charging on poor learners.

The Study Team's proposal for an NQF Strategic Partnership would directly address the current gap in collective thinking within government about the SAQA budget and the broader resource needs of NQF implementation. Since the EU grant ends in December 2003, an alternative and long-term budget strategy would need to be installed by the start of the 2003/2004 financial year. There is no time to be lost. The most efficient way to proceed would be for a senior working group comprising DoE, DoL and SAQA representatives to work with Treasury officials to develop a strategic approach to NQF financing, including SAQA's budget. The group would benefit by the expert assistance of an appropriately experienced economist. The funding needs and revenue resources of all NQF operations should be considered in an integrated manner: standards setting, quality assurance and the NLRD, as well as SAQA's corporate requirements.

The case for state funding

The Study Team's view, based on the South African evidence and international precedent, is that Parliamentary appropriations should be the major source of SAQA's funding. The NQF is a flagship national programme. Its potential to catalyse significant qualitative changes in education and training is well recognised by the stakeholder and provider communities, and such changes are considered crucial for the success of the national HRD Strategy. The case for a major increase in state provision is very strong, on its own merits and also because the case for the only plausible alternative, user charges, is very weak, as we argued above. Donor support is no substitute for a main line obligation of government. In any case donor support will be much scaled down in the near future. It will

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continue to be highly valued but it should be applied strictly to developmental activities and capacity building, in line with SAQA's practice in utilising bilateral assistance.

The changes we propose would help streamline NQF operations and improve productivity. The changes in standards setting, especially the phasing out of NSBs and SGBs, should significantly reduce SAQA's direct costs for such activities. However, they are central to the NQF and it needs to be considered how they should be supported.

The evidence we received indicates that rapid rolling out of new standards and qualifications has been hampered throughout the system by lack of resources. Where dedicated funds for standards setting were available the process moved faster. The new standards setting bodies would comprise the SETAs, the CHE, the DoE and DoL. If SETAs become standards setting bodies, as we propose, there is reason to believe that their standards setting costs would be a legitimate charge on the National Skills Fund, and this should be negotiated with the NSF at the earliest opportunity. SETAs' administrative costs for standards setting should be covered by direct grant from the Department of Labour. The CHE and the Departments of Education and Labour would clearly require targeted state funding, as part of their grant allocation and budgets, respectively, to undertake their own standards setting functions. In all cases the new standards setting bodies would be expected to proceed by appointing or recognising and supporting the work of fit for purpose panels.

As for quality assurance, by regulation at present ETQAs must be self-sufficient in resources and not rely on SAQA to finance them. If our proposals were accepted, almost all (if not all) ETQAs would be statutory bodies each operating under its own law and sponsoring department of state. Their respective positions would be as follows:

- SETAs would be funded by the employers' levy and provider accreditation fees and should require no state support.
- Band ETQAs (CHE/HEQC and GENFETQA) would be funded by their DoE grants and provider accreditation fee income.
- Professional bodies would continue to be funded entirely out of their own members' fees.

ETQAs (except for professional body ETQAs) would be expected to raise substantial revenues by charging fees for provider accreditation. This is a well accepted practice and the Study Team endorses it with an important reservation: fees should be set at realistic rates taking into account the fact that most learners and workers are poor. Over-reliance on this source of revenue would distort the relationship between ETQAs and providers, induce providers to transfer the costs to learners and thus raise the price of learning throughout the system. The Study Team is strongly opposed to such a prospect. To the extent that ETQAs (other than professional bodies) were not fully funded through provider accreditation fees, the gap would have to be made up by grants in terms of their respective founding statutes. On this matter, as on support for standards setting, the government should weigh the cost of investment in education and training quality against the indirect costs to the country of not doing so.

NQF funding model

In summary, the Study Team proposes an integrated approach to NQF financing, undertaken by the NQF Strategic Partnership in collaboration with the National Treasury. The basis would be the government's obligation to ensure the success of NQF implementation. If the Study Team's proposals were accepted, the permanent organs of NQF implementation would comprise SAQA, the CHE, GENFETQA, the SETAs, statutory professional bodies and the Departments of Education and Labour. The funding model required for NQF implementation resolves itself as follows:

- The DoE makes provision for:
 - the annual grant to SAQA, taking into account its streamlined responsibilities and identified priorities, and its limited revenue potential from sale of information products, fees for evaluation of external qualifications and targeted grants from donors;
 - the annual grant to CHE, taking into account the HEQC's needs as an ETQA (offset by its revenue from accreditation fees) as well as the CHE's new role as a standards setting body;
 - the annual grant to GENFETQA in respect of its quality assurance function, taking into account its somewhat limited potential for accreditation fee income;
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoL.

- The DoL makes provision for:
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoE;
 - an annual grant to SETAs to support the administrative costs of their standards setting activities;
 - ensuring that SETAs are funded for their ETQA responsibilities, taking into account their revenue potential from provider accreditation.
- The NSA makes provision for:
 - annual grants to the SETAs to cover their standards setting requirements.
- Statutory professional bodies make provision for:
 - their standards setting activities;
 - their ETQA responsibilities.

Capacity for NQF implementation

Successful development and implementation of the NQF requires knowledge, skills and judgement of a high order in SAQA, among standards setting bodies and quality assurance bodies, in managing the information requirements of the NLRD, and throughout the provider system. This theme has resonated throughout the report and strongly influenced our proposals for accelerating implementation. A simplified NQF architecture and legislative framework, and greater flexibility in NQF operations would ease much of the stakeholders' and providers' concern about complexity, overload, and excessive bureaucratic demands.

Even in a simplified system the need for committed, able and experienced participants will remain high. Special efforts will be needed to ensure that South Africa's NQF makes best use of all the available talent. In particular, the following steps should be taken:

- Many committed players in the NQF process who had been turned off from further participation should be invited back to play their part in a new and more conducive NQF environment.
- NSB and SGB members who have made invaluable contributions during the most difficult inaugural period should be invited to continue their work in the new structures.
- SAQA could give careful attention to the ways in which the development of "self-aware communities of practice" could be fostered in the areas of standards setting, quality assurance and learners' records management. Such communities are continuously being created and renewed through the participatory process on which the NQF has been built. They involve diverse voices from different disciplines and environments, but the "common pool of learning" and "shared quality of experience" are invaluable aspects of capacity building.⁽¹⁹⁾
- SAQA's organisation should be strengthened by contracting a small number of (possibly retired) high-level leaders from the academic, business and skills development environments. They would help the Authority to overcome the credibility gap in dealing with stakeholders and providers to which so many respondents drew our attention. They would also provide valuable mentoring to SAQA's staff.
- The Study Team believes that many able South Africans with specialist skills have not yet been drawn into the work of NQF implementation. SAQA, the standards setting bodies and ETQAs should be encouraged to reach out to centres of specialisation, for example in the academic, training, NGO and stakeholder communities and the national and provincial education departments, especially in the fields of curriculum development, assessment and policy research. The NQF Strategic Partnership could give attention to this matter.

SAQA's current staff complement of about 80 is modest in relation to its national mandate and in comparison with bodies in other countries that have similar or equivalent functions. An international consultant on SAQA's standards setting processes recently described the staffing levels in SAQA as "worryingly low", and explained the effect this has had on SAQA's core functions:

"The pressure to maintain these services means that the visionary leadership function of SAQA is somewhat curtailed. While staff commitment to their task is admirably high, and the quality of work as epitomised in the various policy and operational documents is equally high, the...focus of leadership for the NQF is necessarily compromised. The inevitable result is a tendency to operate on a technical level of systems administration. This is regrettable in the context of the important mission of SAQA in promoting a new concept in education and training."⁽²⁰⁾

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This view echoes that of many respondents to the Study Team. The pressures on SAQA's small establishment have been aggravated by the departure of staff in key positions. It is hard to know whether SAQA's staff turnover is above or below the norm but it has been perceived to be high by the stakeholders and provider bodies that work with SAQA. The establishment of 25 SETAs in March 1999 and their subsequent recruitment activities took its toll on SAQA as on many other organisations. Arguably that was a one-off event and SAQA is rebuilding its staff complement under more normal operating conditions.

SAQA's view is that it has been a training ground for many professionals whose skills are in high demand in the new education and training environment, and in that sense it is performing a service for the community. That is evidently so. But the scale and complexity of SAQA's responsibilities and the seniority of its interactions across the education and training, business and labour environments require it to be an apex national organisation in staff calibre and intellectual culture as well as being highly focussed on its supportive and facilitative role.

SAQA takes its organisational development seriously. It has an integrated human resources strategy with a long-term focus, sensitive to the competitive environment and geared to raise productivity through developing staff competencies and installing best practice systems. The Authority commissioned consultants to benchmark its remuneration policy against that of other non-commercial statutory bodies. It may be that a full-scale operational review needs to be undertaken, especially in the light of the new challenges that SAQA would face if the Study Team's proposals were accepted.

The Study Team believes that two components of SAQA's organisation would need urgent support. We mentioned earlier that the Directorate: Standard Setting and Development would need to be strengthened, not reduced, in order to support the work of the new standards setting bodies. The Directorate: Quality Assurance and Development would also need additional capacity to ensure that the assessment agenda, including RPL, is given the highest possible priority in NQF implementation.

The NQF Strategic Partnership should take under review the staff capacity needs of the new standards setting bodies and ETQAs as well as SAQA if the Study Team's proposals were accepted. This would need to be linked to the integrated budget exercise for NQF implementation.

NQF implementation may start with SAQA and the sub-structures but it involves the whole learning community in one way or another, in workplaces, schools, colleges, technikons and universities. SAQA has won high praise for its capacity building initiatives, supported through technical co-operation agreements. The Department of Labour and the National Skills Authority, as well as the Department of Education in co-operation with the Business Trust and other NGOs, also have a wide array of donor-supported capacity building projects geared to the provider system. All of these have probably not been mapped across the system and the NQF Strategic Partnership provides a vehicle to undertake such an exercise and determine how the values and objectives of the NQF could be better served through provider support across a broad front.

From international experience, provider support is a central issue in implementing the NQF. As many educators and trainers as possible should be involved in the standards setting process. That is an aspect of capacity building which should also pay dividends for the relevance and practicality of standards design. Since only a small minority of all providers could be directly involved, ways should be found to enable the wider provider community to become oriented to the new array of standards and qualifications, especially by making assessment materials available as we recommended earlier. This challenge should be taken on by the SETAs, HEQC and GENFETQA because it is only in the provider system that true transformation of education and training could take place.⁽²¹⁾

Recommendations

The Study Team recommends that:

1. *A long-term budget strategy* should be installed

- by the NQF Strategic Partnership in collaboration with the National Treasury by the start of the 2003/2004 financial year in order to be prepared for the ending of EU support by considering the funding needs and revenue resources of all NQF operations in an integrated manner.

2. *SAQA* should be funded

- mainly by a grant from the DoE, supplemented by sales of information products and targeted donor assistance.

3. *NQF implementation* should be funded

- by a combination of government grants from DoE and DoL, grants from the National Skills Fund, fees for provider accreditation, professional bodies in their own spheres of operation, and targeted donor assistance, according to the following basic funding model:

- The DoE makes provision for:
 - the annual grant to SAQA, taking into account its streamlined responsibilities and identified priorities, and its limited revenue potential from sale of information products, fees for evaluation of external qualifications and targeted grants from donors;
 - the annual grant to CHE, taking into account the HEQC's needs as an ETQA (offset by its revenue from accreditation fees) as well as the CHE's new role as a standards setting body;
 - the annual grant to GENFETQA, in respect of its quality assurance function, taking into account its somewhat limited potential for accreditation fee income;
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoL.
- The DoL makes provision for:
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoE;
 - an annual grant to SETAs to support the administrative costs of their standards setting activities;
 - ensuring that SETAs are funded for their ETQA responsibilities, taking into account their revenue potential from provider accreditation.
- The NSA makes provision for:
 - annual grants to the SETAs to cover their standards setting requirements.
- Statutory professional bodies make provision for:
 - their standards setting activities;
 - their ETQA responsibilities.

4. *All available talent* be made best use of by

- inviting committed former NQF participants back to play their part in a new NQF environment;
- inviting experienced NSB and SGB members to continue their work in the new structures;
- fostering "communities of practice" in the areas of standards setting, quality assurance and learners' records management;
- strengthening SAQA's organisation by contracting a small number of (possibly retired) high-level leaders from the academic, business and skills development environments;
- drawing able South Africans with specialist skills into the work of NQF implementation from the academic, training, NGO and stakeholder communities and the national and provincial education departments, especially in the fields of curriculum development, assessment and policy research.

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5. SAQA should

- become an apex national organisation in staff calibre and intellectual culture as well as being highly focussed on its supportive and facilitative role;
- undertake a full-scale operational review of its organisation, especially in the light of the new challenges that SAQA would face if the Study Team's proposals were accepted; and
- strengthen urgently the Directorate: Standard Setting and Development in order to support the work of the new standards setting bodies, and the Directorate: Quality Assurance and Development in order to manage the high priority assessment agenda, including RPL.

6. The NQF Strategic Partnership should

- in connection with the integrated budget exercise, take under review the staff capacity needs of the new standards setting bodies, ETQAs and SAQA; and
- map provider support across the system in order to determine how the values and objectives of the NQF could be better served through such support.

Endnotes

- (1) [Department of Education], "Lifelong Learning through a National Qualifications Framework: Report of the Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF. Discussion Document," [Convenor, Samuel B A Isaacs] [Pretoria, February 1996], p. 11 (punctuation altered).
- (2) Ken Mockler, Chairperson of SAQA's Finance Committee, kindly provided documents and information on SAQA's budget and financial processes.
- (3) SAQA Act, 1995, sections 5, 10(1), 14.
- (4) NSB Regulations, regs. 12, 26.
- (5) NSB Regulations, regs. 20, 26(5).
- (6) SAQA, *Guidelines and Procedures for Standards Generating Bodies Funding*, ([Pretoria], February 2000), at <http://www.saqa.org.za>.
- (7) SAQA, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* (Pretoria, November 1999), pp. 21-22.
- (8) Skills Development Act, 1998, section 14.
- (9) See for example, John Burdes Pr Eng, "Annual Registration Fees: How are they Determined? And what does ECSA do with them?" at <http://www.ecsa.co.za/Finance/Burdes%20let%20on%20Finance.htm>.
- (10) Higher Education Act, 1997, section 16; GENFETQA Act, 2001, section 13.
- (11) SAQA, "Budget 2002/2003 and Business Plan: April 2002 to March 2007"; SAQA, "Annual Financial Statements for the Years ended 31 March 1998...31 March 2001".
- (12) SAQA, "Budget 2002/2003".
- (13) SAQA, "Annual Financial Statements for the Years ended 31 March 1998...31 March 2001".
- (14) SAQA, "Annual Financial Statements Year Ended: 31 March 2001"; SAQA, "Budget 2002/2003".
- (15) SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament, 1998/99*, p. 7; SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament, 1999/2000*, p. 15; SAQA, *Annual Report April 2000-March 2001*, pp. 13-15.
- (16) The provisions of the SAQA Act, 1995 relating to fee charging (sections 10(1)(b), 10(5) and 14) are complex and somewhat ambiguous. It would appear that the Authority's fee charging must be undertaken in terms of regulations approved by the Minister. The ETQA Regulations, 1998 imply that the power to waive or raise fees may be delegated to an ETQA by the Authority (reg. 10(1)). Fee charging by the Authority itself is not provided for in any regulation under the SAQA Act.
- (17) SAQA, *Annual Report to Parliament April 1999-March 2000*, p.15; Perry and Associates, *Final Report: An income generating and associated marketing strategy for SAQA which takes into account the possibilities and best options for achieving self-funding status* (30 May 2000). This is an internal SAQA document.
- (18) SAQA, "Briefing Documents for the Study Team on the SAQA Income Generating Strategy," [n.d.]. The figure of R80 000 p.a. per ETQA was said to be the standard SABS rate for the ISO licence.
- (19) The concept of "communities of practice" and the other quotations are from Gary Granville, *Setting Standards in South Africa*, pp. 28-29.
- (20) Gary Granville, *Setting Standards in South Africa*, p. 33.
- (21) See also Gary Granville, *Setting Standards in South Africa*, pp. 33-35.

PART THREE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In concluding the report, the Study Team affirms the significance of the NQF in relation to the transformation of the national learning system and the national Human Resource Development Strategy. The objectives of the NQF are as valid now as they were in 1995. Major development has taken place. The team's proposals will help provide clear direction, clarify roles, release new energies and enthusiasm, and lift implementation to a new level.

The National Qualifications Framework was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create. Thousands of South Africans have participated in its shaping and development. In a remarkably short space of time the NQF has become woven into the fabric of the South African learning system. The process has been dynamic and fraught with a mixture of high expectation and deep misgiving. As the NQF design has rolled out an interesting polarity has developed among those involved in the process. Everyone supports the NQF and its objectives. Almost no one thinks it is being done entirely correctly. Some feel so alienated by the manner of its implementation that they are close to abandoning it.

The most important characteristic of the South African NQF is its political origins. Some may see the NQF as a more or less technical exercise to convert standards into a new outcomes-based format but it has always been more than that. The NQF is a transformatory project, closely identified with the objective of ridding South Africa of its apartheid legacy and opening the doors of learning to all. This accounts for much of the passion that is invested in NQF implementation, and also for the depth of the disappointment that so few signs of progress are yet apparent.

Given its political agenda, it is ironic that many critics of the implementation process have pleaded for the government to demonstrate more leadership of the NQF. The Study Team has suggested the creation of the NQF Strategic Partnership where that could be done, not by dictation but in collaboration with SAQA. All has not been well between the two government sponsors of the NQF, and at times SAQA has felt somewhat bereft of material and moral support. Our proposals have been designed to address the points of contention in these relationships. They show how essential sectoral interests could be protected while the NQF's integrative mission was upheld. A jointly prepared national plan for NQF implementation should for the first time provide targets and indicators of progress across the system. It should make clear the relationship between the NQF and the national Human Resource Development Strategy.

The DoE, DoL and the National Treasury, together with SAQA, will be required to attend to another important need, the new funding model for the NQF. This is most urgent because time has run out on the present arrangements. The new funding model reflects the new architecture we propose for the standards setting and quality assurance components of the NQF. The new arrangements would at a stroke douse many of the tensions and resentments that have smouldered (and at times ignited) as SAQA has moved from one stage of implementation to the next.

Of all the leading exponents of national qualifications frameworks South Africa has the least mature learning system, the greatest social disparities and the most acute capacity problems. Yet is striking how often, given a choice, South Africans have chosen the most austere and demanding option. From the outset our NQF has been all-embracing when other systems have chosen a dual-track approach or left the higher education sector to its own devices. We decided on a complex formula for the representation of interest groups in the standards setting process. We decided not just to record all existing qualifications as others have done but to require providers to reformat all six thousand of them in outcomes-based mode, an exceptionally time-consuming task for providers, NSBs and SAQA staff alike. South Africa decided on an open-ended approach to ETQA recognition that has brought 31 into the arena with more in the offing. We decided on an accreditation process that embraces both provider accreditation and the accreditation of every programme on offer. We decided that every private provider, including every workplace provider of national standards and qualifications, must not only register with the

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Department of Education but apply for accreditation by an ETQA. We decided not just to facilitate the registration of workplace training assessors but to require every summative assessor in the country to be registered by a certain date after achieving the necessary unit standard.

Decisions like these have been made with the most honourable of intentions: to ensure that the message of transformation through quality assured qualifications was taken into every nook and cranny of our learning system. However, cumulatively such decisions have put the NQF under terrific stress and, in retrospect, provoked the circumstances that brought the Study Team into being.

The team has had the privilege of learning at close quarters what SAQA has achieved in its five years of operation, and we have developed a keen sense of the commitment and energy that has been invested in every aspect of the NQF development and implementation processes. We have given full weight to the voices of our respondents and the suggestive experience of other countries and made proposals that would simplify many of the demands that are being made on providers, ETQAs and standards setters alike.

Our proposals are designed to reconcile the needs of the different learning communities and help bind each of them to the objectives of the NQF in its own way. There is great need to infuse the NQF with trust and mutual respect. We place emphasis on the importance of communities of trust in which providers and users of qualifications develop a common understanding of the purpose of standards and qualifications and how best they can be achieved. We consider that qualifications and standards on their own are but instruments to facilitate learning, and that curriculum and pedagogy and assessment form the cornerstones of the national learning system and must be given their due.

In conclusion, we draw attention once again to the two priorities of NQF implementation that must claim the most serious attention. These are:

- the development of a plan for assessment reform, including RPL, along the lines we have proposed; and
- the necessity for wide-ranging and sustained capacity building throughout the NQF system, with particular attention to the needs of providers.

Our last word is reserved for something outside our terms of reference, but vital to the success of the HRD Strategy and the broad objectives of the NQF. We refer to the total insufficiency of provision for diversified skills development in the FET band, both present and projected, and also at the interface between further and higher education and training. We trust the NQF Strategic Partnership will increase the visibility of this need and mobilise support for it to be met.

Recommendations of the Study Team

We conclude by providing a full list of our recommendations.

Qualifications design and implementation

1. Unit standards should

- be devised so as to be easily convertible into corresponding units of learning;
- avoid over-specification of written statements alone;
- include the exemplification of standards through learners' work;
- reflect a relationship of trust between those devising them and those who will use them; and
- be interpreted flexibly in different contexts, as implied in SAQA guidelines.

2. Assessment arrangements should

- be devised taking careful note of the views of teachers and trainers on practicability;
- be supported by a national bank of assessment instruments; and
- accept the use of grading, where appropriate.

3. *Qualifications policy* should recognise that

- qualifications based on unit standards and “whole qualifications” are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education; and
- it may be unnecessary in the longer term to perpetuate the division between these two types of qualification, provided that the concept of unit standards is interpreted flexibly.

4. *The NQF* should

- be based on 10 levels, reflecting the qualification requirements of the respective bands and taking account of international comparability; and
- avoid additional sub-levels, in the interests of simplicity.

5. *Qualifications design* should

- be fit for purpose;
- explicitly permit qualifications of less than 120 credits when need is demonstrated; and
- treat the regulations on Fundamental Learning as guidance, so as to allow standards setting bodies to take account of the needs of learners.

6. *Critical Outcomes* assessment should be clarified by

- drawing a distinction between the first five Critical Outcomes, which are in principle assessable, and the rest, which are educational aims;
- integrating Critical Outcomes assessment where possible into the core learning and assessment of the qualification, while recognising the needs of some learners to focus on the acquisition of Critical Outcomes skills and to be assessed discretely; and
- developing generic standards for the first five Critical Outcomes at levels 1-4, both to meet the needs of learners who are focussing on the acquisition of skills, and to promote consistency and progression in Critical Outcomes standards.

7. *RPL implementation* should be

- accorded priority, provided with appropriate incentives and targets;
- speeded up through the simplification of standards setting and quality assurance arrangements;
- based on the recognition that the assessment processes for RPL do not differ significantly from “normal” assessment; and be
- undertaken in a developmental context with the appropriate guidance infrastructure and training for assessors.

Standards setting and quality assurance

1. *New standards setting bodies* should become

- responsible for the technical quality, consultation, accountability and leadership functions currently undertaken by the National Standards Bodies.

2. *The National Standards Bodies* should be

- disestablished in a properly phased manner, with care being taken to retain in the NQF system the experience and expertise of NSB members.

3. *The SETAs, Council on Higher Education, Department of Education and Department of Labour* should be

- formally recognised as standards setting bodies for their defined areas of interest; and
- charged with making transitional arrangements for the currently recognised SGBs (which would lose that status), for the work being undertaken under their auspices, and for the retention of SGB members’ expertise within the system.

4. *The SETAs* should be recognised as the standards setting bodies for their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 1 to 4 and for unit standards-based qualifications and unit standards in their defined economic sectors for NQF levels 5 and 6.

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5. *The CHE* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for NQF levels 7 and 8 and for whole qualifications for NQF levels 5 and 6.

6. *The Department of Education* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for schooling (grades R-12), technical colleges and ABET non-vocational standards and qualifications.

7. *The Department of Labour* should be

- recognised as the standards setting body for generic vocational standards.

8. *The Department of Education and Department of Labour* should be

- jointly responsible for the development of Critical Outcomes standards.

9. *The current quality assurance model* should be

- changed to an integrated accreditation model which relies on up front evaluation of a provider's capability to provide high quality education and training leading to the award of NQF credits for a particular scope of activity; the ongoing monitoring of provider activities; self-evaluation by providers; and quality audit; and
- SAQA and the ETQAs should reach an agreement on a set of common quality assurance standards and criteria that would make up the Quality Standards for Accredited Education and Training Providers so as to ensure consistency across ETQAs for provider accreditation.

10. *In principle a provider* should

- go through one ETQA only for accreditation, depending on the NQF level and the scope of activity.

11. *The quality assurance body for a multi-purpose provider* should be

- the band ETQA for the highest NQF level being sought.

12. *The quality assurance body for a single-purpose provider* should be

- the ETQA responsible for the setting of the standards or the band ETQA where the standard setter is not also an ETQA.

13. *The definition of a private institution in the FET and HE Acts* should be

- amended to bring consistency between the two Acts;
- amended to include providers offering programmes for national standards and qualifications of less than 120 credits; and
- amended to exclude workplace providers unless they offer programmes for a fee to the public at large, thus removing workplaces from the requirement to seek registration.

14. *Registration as assessors* should not be

- required of individuals employed by an accredited institution or accredited workplace provider and the requirement should be amended accordingly.

15. *Large workplace providers* should be

- required to seek accreditation by the relevant ETQA.

16. *Small and medium workplace providers* should be

- required to use registered assessors to award credit for standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.

17. *The ETQA responsible for the setting of standards/qualifications within its designated area of interest* should be

- responsible for moderation, the registration of assessors, and jurisdiction over the issuing of certificates of award and achievement should be undertaken by.

18. Provider accreditation should be

- defined to reflect what the status means in relation to the NQF.

19. The number of ETQAs should be

- limited by
 - declaring a moratorium on further applications;
 - accrediting no additional ETQAs;
 - cancelling the category of Social Sector ETQAs; and
 - giving consideration to confining ETQA status to bodies established by statute.

Leadership and governance

1. The NQF Strategic Partnership should be

- established in law, to comprise the senior executives of the Department of Education, the Department of Labour and SAQA, to ensure clear strategic leadership of NQF implementation, to approve and monitor the National Plan on NQF Implementation, and to resolve differences.

2. The NQF Forum should be

- established to meet at least annually to exchange experience, review progress and advise the Strategic Partnership on the implementation of the NQF.

3. The SAQA Board should be

- reconstituted, to comprise not more than 15 members, appointed after public nominations by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour, against clear criteria to be specified in the Act.

4. The NQF legislative framework should be

- reviewed and revised as soon as government has determined its response to this report.

Resourcing the NQF: funding and capacity

1. A long-term budget strategy should be

- installed by the NQF Strategic Partnership in collaboration with the National Treasury by the start of the 2003/2004 financial year in order to be prepared for the ending of EU support by considering the funding needs and revenue resources of all NQF operations in an integrated manner.

2. SAQA should be

- funded mainly by a grant from the DoE, supplemented by sales of information products and targeted donor assistance.

3. NQF implementation should be

- funded by a combination of government grants from DoE and DoL, grants from the National Skills Fund, fees for provider accreditation, professional bodies in their own spheres of operation, and targeted donor assistance, according to the following basic funding model:

- The DoE makes provision for:
 - the annual grant to SAQA, taking into account its streamlined responsibilities and identified priorities, and its limited revenue potential from sale of information products, fees for evaluation of external qualifications and targeted grants from donors;
 - the annual grant to CHE, taking into account the HEQC's needs as an ETQA (offset by its revenue from accreditation fees) as well as the CHE's new role as a standards setting body;
 - the annual grant to GENFETQA, in respect of its quality assurance function, taking into account its somewhat limited potential for accreditation fee income;
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoL.

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- The DoL makes provision for:
 - the department's own standards setting responsibilities, on its own and in collaboration with DoE;
 - an annual grant to SETAs to support the administrative costs of their standards setting activities;
 - ensuring that SETAs are funded for their ETQA responsibilities, taking into account their revenue potential from provider accreditation.
- The NSA makes provision for:
 - annual grants to the SETAs to cover their standards setting requirements.
- Statutory professional bodies make provision for:
 - their standards setting activities;
 - their ETQA responsibilities.

4. *All available talent* should be made best use of by

- inviting committed former NQF participants back to play their part in a new NQF environment;
- inviting experienced NSB and SGB members to continue their work in the new structures;
- fostering "communities of practice" in the areas of standards setting, quality assurance and learners' records management;
- strengthening SAQA's organisation by contracting a small number of (possibly retired) high-level leaders from the academic, business and skills development environments;
- drawing able South Africans with specialist skills into the work of NQF implementation from the academic, training, NGO and stakeholder communities and the national and provincial education departments, especially in the fields of curriculum development, assessment and policy research.

5. *SAQA* should

- become an apex national organisation in staff calibre and intellectual culture as well as being highly focussed on its supportive and facilitative role;
- undertake a full-scale operational review of its organisation, especially in the light of the new challenges that SAQA would face if the Study Team's proposals were accepted; and
- strengthen urgently the Directorate: Standard Setting and Development in order to support the work of the new standards setting bodies, and the Directorate: Quality Assurance and Development in order to manage the high priority assessment agenda, including RPL.

6. *The NQF Strategic Partnership* should

- in connection with the integrated budget exercise, take under review the staff capacity needs of the new standards setting bodies, ETQAs and SAQA; and
- map provider support across the system in order to determine how the values and objectives of the NQF could be better served through such support.

APPENDICES

MEMBERS OF THE STUDY TEAM

(Members' present or previous links with SAQA or the NQF are indicated)

Dr Jairam Reddy, Chairperson

Consultant; Member, Council of the United Nations University; Member, Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education; former Vice-Chancellor, University of Durban-Westville; former Chairperson, National Commission on Higher Education

Dr André Dippenaar, Member

Advisor, Chamber of Mines; Chairperson, Committee on Education and Training, Business South Africa; Co-Chair, National Skills Authority; Member, South African Qualifications Authority; former Chairperson, National Education and Training Forum; former member, Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the National Qualifications Framework

Ms Busisiwe Mncube, Member

Gauteng Provincial Education Convenor, Congress of South African Trade Unions; Co-Chair, National Skills Authority; former Deputy Chairperson, National Standards Body 05: Education, Training and Development

Ms Ruth Moorhouse, Member

Director, Student Services Group, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand; former General Manager: Framework Development and Registrations, New Zealand Qualifications Authority; former consultant to the South African Department of Education on the form and structure of the NQF

Dr Menzi Mthwecu, Member

Chief Executive Officer, Mining Qualifications Authority (Mining Sector Education and Training Authority); former member, Task Team on the National Qualifications Framework, Centre for Education Policy Development

Dr Mokubung Nkomo, Member

Executive Director, Education Policy Research Programme, Human Sciences Research Council; Chairperson, South African Qualifications Authority; former Chairperson, South African Certification Council; former member, editorial team, National Education Policy Investigation

Mr Brian O'Connell, Member

Rector, University of the Western Cape; former Superintendent-General, Western Cape Education Department; Chairperson of the Board, National Access Consortium Western Cape; former member of the South African Qualifications Authority representing provincial heads of education departments

Professor Ben Parker, Member

Professor of Ethics, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg; former Director: Teacher Education, Department of Education; Member, CHE/DoE/SAQA Interim Joint Committee for the Registration and Accreditation of Higher Education Qualifications; former Chairperson, Technical Committee for the Revision of the Norms and Standards for Educators, Department of Education

Mr Ron Tuck, Member

Consultant on international education and training specialising in vocational education and training and secondary education reform; former Chief Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority; former HM Chief Inspector of Schools for Scotland

Professor Michael Young, Member

Professor of Education, Institute of Education University of London; former Head, Post-16 Education Centre, ULIE; former consultant, Congress of South African Trade Unions on the National Training Strategy Initiative; former consultant, Task Team on the National Qualifications Framework, Centre for Education Policy Development

Appendix A

Dr Trevor Coombe, Head, Research Team

Consultant, Department of Education; former Deputy Director-General: Systems and Planning, Department of Education; former consultant on ETQA matters, South African Certification Council; former Chairperson, Inter-Ministerial Working Group on the National Qualifications Framework; former Director, Centre for Education Policy Development

Ms Nazeema Mohamed, Member, Research Team

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Mr Mareka Monyokolo, Member, Research Team

Consultant; former Deputy Director, Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development; former researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand Education Policy Unit and the Centre for Education Policy Development, Evaluation and Management

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. This memorandum outlines the approach of the Ministers of Education and Labour to the focused study of the development of the NQF. It includes an outline of the purpose and terms of reference of the study.

Background

2. Establishing the NQF is a joint responsibility of the Ministers of Education and Labour. The Ministers jointly supported the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) by an Act of Parliament. They therefore have joint responsibility for examining, shaping and reporting on the progress being made with developing the NQF.
3. The establishment of a National Qualifications Framework - that links one level of learning to another without restrictions, and links the traditional domains of education and training - and the overall improvement of the quality of education provision are critical for our learning revolution and our country's post-apartheid socio-economic reconstruction and development.
4. The first post-apartheid education legislation passed by the National Assembly was the South African Qualifications Act, 1995.
5. The SAQA Act provides for the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority and the development of the NQF. It enables the establishment of national standards bodies to register all the standards and qualifications consistent with the goals of the NQF, and the accreditation of quality assurance bodies that would assure the quality of the programmes and qualifications offered by providers.
6. Six years after the passage of the SAQA Act, we must examine the challenges that have been thrown up by the implementation of the NQF regulatory frameworks. The question that arises is what are the next steps to be taken in implementing the NQF? The Ministers of Education and Labour have decided to appoint an authoritative team to study these matters and advise on the way forward. Cabinet has concurred with this decision.

The terms of reference

7. The study demonstrates government's commitment to the building of the NQF. It will not be aimed at reviewing the government's goals and policies, but it will examine how the NQF is developing and how we can focus, accelerate and strengthen its implementation.
8. The high level study will focus on the following matters:
 - Relevant and contemporary international developments on national qualifications frameworks and implementation procedures and their implications for our NQF practice and future directions.
 - The match between objectives and outcomes (as outlined in relevant policies and legislation), and the experiences and attitudes of education and training providers and learners with the implementation of the NQF.
 - The extent to which the South African Qualifications Authority has put in place the appropriate and relevant policies, procedures, delivery systems, other resources and capacities essential for the establishment of the NQF and for implementing the relevant mandates of the Ministers of Education and Labour on education and training, and how these can be improved. The study should examine and advise in particular how to

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address the concerns among some key social partners and stakeholders about an apparent proliferation of bodies and procedures, and an apparent fragmentation of roles and responsibilities in the areas of quality assurance and national standards development.

- Any other obstacles, real or perceived, to streamlining the implementation of the NQF.

9. The study team will at the appropriate moments hold high level consultations with the Parliamentary Education and Labour Portfolio Committees, and the Departments of Education and Labour.

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Notes on an introductory meeting on the focused study of the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework

Introduction

1. An introductory meeting convened jointly by Ihron Rensburg and Adrienne Bird was held on 17 April 2001 at the Department of Education, Sol Plaatje House, Schoeman Street, Pretoria attended by

- Ihron Rensburg - Deputy Director-General: General Education and Training, Department of Education
- Adrienne Bird - Chief Director: Employment and Skills Development Services, Department of Labour
- Jairam Reddy - Chairperson of the Study Team
- Trevor Coombe - Head of Research for the Study Team

2. The meeting was called to brief Jairam Reddy and Trevor Coombe on the background to the Ministers' decision to undertake an external review of the NQF and to discuss preparations for the work. [Ihron Rensburg represents the Department of Education and Adrienne Bird represents the Department of Labour on the SAQA Board.]

Reasons for the external review

3. The possibility of a review has been discussed for some time. Within SAQA there has been support for an internal review process but the idea of an external review has been contested. There is enormous concern within SAQA that an external review would destabilise the new system they have laboured to create, slow down implementation at a crucial stage of development, and cause widespread demoralisation.

4. Shortly after the 1999 elections, the new Board engaged on its own strategic planning process to review its policies and leadership. It was acknowledged that the Board was not providing sufficient leadership, in the face of mounting concern about the early bureaucratisation of the NQF. Recently the Board has set up an internal benchmarking exercise (being undertaken by Mala Singh, Samuel Isaacs, Rachmat Omar and Adrienne Bird) and a financial study (led by Ken Mockler with representatives of the Departments of Education and Labour and external expertise).

5. Nevertheless, the Ministers of Education and Labour are in agreement that an external review of the NQF is necessary. It is customary for the Minister of Education to appoint a review team to help him come to grips with an issue with which he feels uneasy or dissatisfied, and in this case he seems to have been influenced by views that the NQF is not going according to plan.

6. In fact, a broad malaise of discontent with SAQA and the NQF took hold some time last year.

- There were general concerns. The NQF is a good thing, but it is taking too long for SAQA's systems to become operational. Is it being done efficiently? Do the outcomes justify the investment? Are we trying to build a Mercedes when what we need is a VW?
- There were specific concerns in many different constituencies:
 - There has been concern amongst SAUVCA and the CTP that the role of Higher Education in the NQF has not been understood and appreciated. There was considerable controversy whether qualifications should be registered as unit standards or as whole qualifications at levels 5-8. Similar controversies in Australia and New Zealand caused great unease. The issue was largely defused when SAQA agreed that both options were acceptable.
 - The Department of Education embarked on the process of registering private Higher Education institutions. Accreditation was regarded as a necessary prerequisite for registration. [In fact, the ETQA Regulations require the opposite.] Private Higher Education providers wanted rapid accreditation processes to enable them to advertise the quality of their offerings. They were extremely frustrated by the accreditation process managed

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by SAQA, which acted as an interim quality assurance body on behalf of the CHE since the HEQC had not yet been established. Much of the assessment was outsourced, chiefly to SERTEC, the technikon quality assurance/accreditation body. The assessment was not always rigorously undertaken. Neither the providers nor the Department of Education were happy with the accreditation process, not necessarily for the same reasons. The Minister of Education was irritated at being taken to court by companies dissatisfied with confusion and delays.

- Employers were concerned at the time it took to register unit standards. (SAQA has since committed itself to a maximum turn around time of four months.)
- A rumour spread that no levy grants would be paid unless providers were accredited, and yet the SETA ETQA process was just getting started.
- Unions were impatient with the slow delivery of RPL, an issue linked to wage negotiations. There were demands for competence to be “deemed” to exist on the basis of years of experience.
- Community bodies were concerned that their voices were not being properly heard. The prohibitive costs of attending public meetings may exclude many from participation.
- A more general concern about the complexity of the systems, which seems to have arisen from poor communication.

7. All of this was probably predictable, given the scale and complexity of what is being attempted. Some of these concerns have since subsided, following targeted interventions by SAQA, however others persist. Efforts need to be expended to identify the most urgent and specific problems inhibiting implementation currently. Despite the malaise, those who have been directly involved in the development of the NQF (with some vociferous exceptions) are remarkably protective of the systems they are creating. This sentiment cuts across all constituencies. People talk about it with pride and a high degree of ownership.

Issues to be examined

8. These are some of the serious issues to be examined in the external review.

- The ToRs make clear that the Ministers are not seeking to reverse the establishment of the NQF. But the key question is whether the institutional apparatus of the NQF is appropriate for South Africa. If so what are the bottlenecks on the operational side, in particular the operations of the NSBs, SGBs and ETQAs? (Hypothetically, it is still possible that the key problem is communication - and that the systems themselves are strong.) Has SAQA adopted suitable methods for the accreditation of providers and programmes? It must not be forgotten that the ultimate objective of the NQF is to facilitate equity, access and mobility of learners and improve the quality of learning outcomes.
- The SAQA processes have unleashed the most remarkable amount of energy on the training side, but can energy be translated into learning provision? Now that a large number of SETAs have registered standards, implementation is all-important. Critics of the English National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) system say that too much effort went into standards setting and not enough into implementation. In South Africa, the link between standards setting and the SETA legislation is absolutely crucial to the success of the skills development enterprise. In particular, it is crucially important that funds should flow. Should SAQA be identifying priorities and driving issues of policy implementation? For instance the slow implementation of RPL? Or are these best left to other bodies, such as the SETA system through the sector skills plans, or the Department of Education in relation, say, to the prioritisation of Maths and Science education? (A start has been made with Joint Implementation Plans (JIPs)).
- Was the separation of ETQAs and SGBs an appropriate design feature? Would it be more efficient to allow SETAs to set their own standards? Or is it more important for SGBs and NSBs to open up the process and defend the national interest in education and training? Over 500 learnerships have already been named and nearly 100 are in the process of being registered.
- Is the structure of the SAQA Board appropriate? The constituency base of the SAQA Board is very deep. To what extent does the Board have the capacity to lead? To what extent are members trapped in their constituencies and unable to act in the national interest? The advantages of widespread “buy in” have to be weighed against

“constituency bias”. The question of registering whole higher education qualifications or unit standards has been resolved by SAQA, and an HEQC-led process to develop generic qualifications in six areas has helped to defuse tension. The SAQA office and the HEQC have shown great maturity in negotiating these issues with all concerned. But problems remain. Has the Higher Education sector taken ownership of the qualifications design process? Is the Department of Education committed to SAQA's role in the Higher Education field? Who has primacy in the development of Higher Education qualifications? There has been a flawed assumption that Higher Education institutions have always owned all Higher Education qualifications. Professional institutes, business and industry have also had a historic role in establishing and awarding many Higher Education qualifications. What should be the role of the social partners? From the SETA perspective such questions are not merely technical but relate to the important issue of opening up pathways of progression for learners. Already the tourism and hospitality and clothing SETAs have registered unit standards and qualifications from the lowest to the highest levels, including technician, degree and postgraduate levels. Does the NSB/SGB architecture provide the appropriate vehicle for negotiation of disputes - or is it precisely because these structures are not seen to be legitimate sites that the problem is persisting? There was great contestation about the representation of Higher Education bodies on NSBs, and the final allocation of one (?) representative. That has fueled the view that these bodies are not legitimate. Perhaps representation could be revisited to address this.

- Likewise, quality assurance is disputed territory. In Higher Education, what should be the respective roles of the HEQC, the SETA ETQAs and the professional council ETQAs? There is potential for another explosion in connection with the GENFETQA Bill and the establishment of the GENFETQA, since the SETA ETQAs are deeply involved in FET. The contestation revolves around the meaning of the “co-ordinating role” ascribed to the HEQC (and presumably the same will arise in relation to the GENFETQA). Precisely who plays what role needs to be clarified. There is a need for high-level, mature intervention to avoid this.
- The design of the Framework, its implementation and the implications for providers are all inter-connected. The NQF grid provides a useful template for providers to offer qualifications either in one band or across a number of bands. There are fears that the Department of Education is trying to force providers to operate in one band or another. Is this the case? Is it desirable? Has the NQF pulled us away from focusing on the process of learning? Is it the NQF that is at fault or does the problem lie in the relationship between the NQF and other components of the education and training system? SAQA has an administrative and professional capacity problem. SAQA has had difficulty in filling its posts with adequately qualified staff because there is a limited supply of high level professionals in the country. For the same reason SAQA has a high rate of turnover of professional staff. There has been a mass exodus to the SETAs in recent months.
- Communicating SAQA's goals and achievements is a problem. What SAQA has achieved is nothing less than a social revolution, but it has not been effectively communicated to the South African public. Recently the Executive Officer has appointed a communication company to produce a communication plan. Despite the weaknesses in SAQA's performance that have been identified, much important work has been done and needs to be publicised. The communication study will raise a key question. Is SAQA sufficiently focused in its implementation of the NQF or are its activities too dispersed? Who should prioritise SAQA's activities?

The internal review

9. The internal benchmarking exercise is tackling the issue of impact. It has started by considering the five objectives of SAQA spelled out in the SAQA Act, 1995. What indicators are appropriate to measure progress in achieving these objectives? The benchmarking exercise is seeking to define these measures. Given that the SAQA objectives are extremely broad, the challenge will be to determine which of these measures can be achieved by SAQA alone, and which are system wide indicators which must be taken on by, for example, the HRD Strategy in partnership with SAQA. The temptation to list the number of SGBs created and similar organisational indices must be avoided, and focus must be on the learners. A document has been prepared and a researcher is being recruited. The benchmarking team is expected to report in six months.

SAQA's financial position

10. SAQA received some R5.8 million in state funding in its first year of operation as a direct transfer from the Department of Education budget. The Executive Officer has always maintained that the chief problem of implementation is financial. The government has not funded SAQA at a level that is any way commensurate with the scale of its responsibilities. Thus far the EO has been very successful in raising donor resources, but fund-raising and everything connected with it (such as reporting) has taken a disproportionate share of his and his colleagues' time and energy. In the medium to long term, donor funding will cease. The EO has proposed a schedule of user charges for SAQA services that is intended to contribute to SAQA's financial sustainability. The Departments of Education and Labour have blocked the proposed rates on the grounds that the burden of costs will ultimately be passed on to the poor: the learners and their families. In Britain, the costs of the NVQ system are being held responsible for very poor take-up. The financial study by Ken Mockler [Chairperson of the SAQA Finance Committee] and his team is intended to address this problem. The starting assumption of the study is that the level of state funding will remain constant. [This is for purposes of analysis. It is not the wish of the Authority.]

NQF LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Working paper by the Research Team

Introduction

1. This paper provides a summary of legislative provisions relating to the NQF, with explanatory comments. It begins with two documents that are not laws but are among the earliest formal policy statements of the new democratic government.

White Paper on Reconstruction and Development (Notice No. 1954 of 1994, 23 November 1994), published by the Ministry in the Office of the President

Human resource development

2. The RDP White Paper provides “a guide to action and checklist of performance” in five programme areas, of which the second is “Developing our Human Resources”. It supports “proper recognition for previously disregarded skills and an integrated approach to education and training”. The RDP “will foster the concept of life-long learning and it will integrate the energies of all the institutions from the pre-school upwards”.

3. Under the heading “Labour market and human resource development”, the White Paper states:

“A coherent human resource development policy will be developed to focus on skill acquisition and adult basic education for the incumbent workforce and those who have been deprived of basic schooling. Measures will be implemented to provide an integrated approach to education and training with emphasis on the demand for specific skills in the labour market. The link between education and training will be facilitated through a National Qualifications Framework and a South African Qualification Authority.”

Comment

4. The RDP White Paper makes no mention of the establishment of “a single national ministry responsible for education and training”, which was pledged in the ANC’s *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (1994) and *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (1994).

White Paper on Education and Training, *Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Steps to Develop a New System* (Notice No. 196 of 1995, 15 March 1995), published by the Ministry of Education

An integrated approach

5. Education White Paper 1 includes a chapter on “Why Education and Training?” It argues that education and training are closely related concepts, and an integrated approach would maximise the benefits of the relationship between them. Successful modern economies require the elimination of artificial hierarchies of knowledge linked to occupational and social hierarchies.

“An integrated approach to education and training, linked to the development of a new National Qualification Framework (NQF) based on a system of credits for learning outcomes achieved, will encourage creative work on the design of curricula and the recognition of learning attainments wherever education and training are offered. It will open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge (acquired informally or by work experience) has not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised for admission to further learning, or employment purposes.”

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6. This chapter describes the establishment of the Education/Labour Inter-Ministerial Working Group “to develop their interests in an integrated approach to education and training and a National Qualification Framework, and to clarify their respective competencies with regard to training”. Note is taken of the “not unreasonable” anxieties of the general education and skills training camps about the one being swamped or over-ridden by the other. “Enabling the National Qualification Framework to be developed in an evolutionary, participatory, and consensual way, within clear policy guidelines, will be the best way of implementing the new strategy.”

7. Chapter 5 deals further with the National Qualification Framework as the first of a number of “Developmental Initiatives”. It describes the current status of the “draft NQF Bill”, and sketches the possible development of a framework comprising eight levels. (The plural form “Qualifications” was adopted later in the SAQA Act, 1995.)

Comment

8. The Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) was established with two Ministerial mandates: to propose how the “training” function under the Department of Labour might be merged in a new Ministry of Education and Training, and to develop policy and legislation for the NQF. After several months’ work the DoL representatives were instructed to suspend their participation in the first mandate, in the light of the Ministry of Labour’s active labour market policy development process. The suspension was never rescinded.

9. The IMWG developed the NQF policy document and draft Bill, managed the public consultation and revision process, monitored the Parliamentary consideration of the Bill, and once enacted, oversaw the process of nomination and appointment of the first members of the Authority. When the Authority had held its inaugural meeting, the IMWG was formally brought to an end.

10. DoL and DoE have established a number of consultative structures over the intervening years – notably in relation to Learnerships and the national HRD Strategy – but there has been no joint body to oversee the NQF.

South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995)

Objectives

11. The Act is “To provide for the development of a National Qualifications Framework and for this purpose to establish the South African Qualifications Authority”. The objectives of the NQF are to:

- a. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- b. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- c. enhance the quality of education and training;
- d. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- e. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large”.

Comment

12. With the possible exception of the first objective, these all involve processes toward long-term goals. Moreover items b-d are very modestly stated. They don’t say explicitly that the NQF is only one player in the achievement of these objectives, but that is certainly the implication.

Joint Ministerial authority

13. The Minister of Education must act “in consultation with” (that is, with the agreement of) the Minister of Labour in respect of:

- the nomination and appointment of members of the Authority;
- the receipt of advice from SAQA “on matters affecting the registration of standards and qualifications”;
- the approval of regulations;

- the abolition of any statutory body “that performs functions similar to the Authority”;
- the approval of conditions of service of SAQA officers and employees; and
- the receipt of annual financial reports.

Comment

14. The clear intention is joint stewardship by the two Ministers. However, with one or two exceptions the Ministers’ roles are rather passive. They have the power of appointment of members of the Authority, but between them they choose only a maximum of six of the 30 members. The Ministers jointly have little if any proactive power to direct SAQA except perhaps through stipulating the form of SAQA’s annual report (section 13(2)). Oddly enough, the Act gives to the Minister of Education alone the power to “approve” the “National Qualifications Framework”. This provision occurs in the definitions (section 1), where NQF “means the National Qualifications Framework approved by the Minister [of Education] for the registration of national standards and qualifications” (section 1(v)). The Act makes no further mention of such approval or what it might entail. It is almost certainly a drafting error that excludes the Minister of Labour from the approval process. The Minister of Labour is also excluded from section 7(5), which empowers the Minister of Education to designate SAQA to perform “any other function...which is relevant to the National Qualifications Framework”. The Minister of Labour must jointly approve regulations relating to fee charging by SAQA (section 14) but otherwise plays no part in decisions concerning SAQA’s funds (section 15).

Membership of the Authority

13. The membership of the Authority comprises (section 4):

- the chairperson;
- a nominee of the DG: Education;
- a nominee of the heads of provincial education departments;
- a nominee of the DG: Labour;
- a nominee of the National Training Board (now National Skills Authority);
- two members representing organised labour;
- two members representing organised business;
- one member each representing the CUP (now SAUVCA), CTP, the teachers college principals, technical college principals, other colleges, the ABET sector, the ECD sector, the ELSEN sector;
- three members representing the organised teaching profession;
- two members representing lecturers and trainers;
- not more than six nominees of the Ministers;
- not more than two members co-opted by the Authority with Ministerial approval; and
- the Executive Officer.

Comment

14. The principles here are inclusivity and representivity. The departmental nominees have no special status. The numerical balance of the membership is tilted in favour of the “education” rather than the “skills development” side. This is especially conspicuous since the Act has not been amended to take into account the establishment of SETAs. Although the membership is inclusive, the professional bodies are not represented as of right (but they have been included by Ministerial appointment). The Ministers are not guided by the Act as to how to exercise their discretionary power of appointment. In practice the public nomination process provided for in section 4(4) has assisted them to choose.

Functions of the Authority

14. The functions of the Authority are to:

“(1) ...

- (a) (i) oversee the development of the NQF; and
- (ii) formulate and publish policies and criteria for –
 - (aa) the registration of bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications; and

Appendix D

- (bb) the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing the achievements in terms of such standards or qualifications;
- (b) oversee the implementation of the NQF, including –
 - i. the registration or accreditation of bodies referred to in paragraph (a) and the assignment of functions to them;
 - ii. the registration of national standards and qualifications;
 - iii steps to ensure compliance with provisions for accreditation; and
 - iv. steps to ensure that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable;
- (c) to advise the Minister on matters affecting registration of standards and qualifications; and
- (d) be responsible for the control of the finances of the Authority.

- “(2) The Authority shall pursue the objectives of the NQF as provided in section 2 and execute the functions of the Authority as provided in subsection (1) –
- a. after consultation and in co-operation with the departments of state, statutory bodies, companies, bodies and institutions responsible for education, training and certification of standards which will be affected by the NQF;
 - b. with due regard for the respective competence of Parliament and the provincial legislatures in terms of section 126 of the [Interim 1993] Constitution, and the rights, powers and functions of the governing bodies of a university or universities and a technikon or technikons as provided in any Act of Parliament.” (section 5)

15. Although not a function as such, the Authority is given discretionary power (with the approval of the Ministers) to make regulations on any matter needed to give effect to the Act (section 14(a) and (c)), including fees that it may charge or waive “for the granting of any registration or accreditation” and “for any services provided by the Authority”. (section 14(b))

Comment

16. These provisions are the heart of the Act. The rest of the Act deals with procedural matters. The language of section 5 seems uncertain and quaint. This is partly because the drafters were uncertain of the appropriate vocabulary to employ in describing what was envisaged. Why are standards bodies to be “registered” and ETQAs to be “accredited”? The term “accredited” is not defined, but “registered” means “registered in terms of the NQF” (section 1(ix)), which is not particularly helpful.

17. The drafters used circuitous language because they were at pains to pre-empt next to nothing. SAQA was to undertake (or “oversee”) the development of the NQF through consultation and co-operation with all affected parties. The Act specifies only the rudimentary outlines of two groups of sub-structures, for standards/qualifications and QA respectively.

18. This section requires the Authority to tiptoe through its responsibilities, operating by consent of all concerned, not by direction or coercion. (section 5(2)) Even so, provision is made for SAQA to resolve disputes arising out of the performance of its functions. (section 7(2)) SAQA is required to show special sensitivity toward the (new) national/provincial division of legislative competence and the “rights, powers and functions” of university and technikon governing bodies. (section 5(2)(b)) The latter provision reflects two circumstances prevailing in 1995. One was section 247 of the Interim Constitution, which embodied one of the most difficult compromises negotiated by the drafters. This required *bona fide* negotiation to take place between the government and a governing body of a school or tertiary institution if the government intended to change its “rights, powers and functions”. The second was the CUP’s and CTP’s fear that the new government would ride roughshod over institutional autonomy. This section still provides the Higher Education institutions with the basis for a legal challenge against any action of SAQA’s that disregards their statutory rights.

19. The nearest the Act comes to giving SAQA some assertive functional responsibility is in section 5(1)(b)(iii), where the Authority is given the duty to take “steps to ensure compliance with provisions for accreditation [of ETQAs]”. The Act gives no clue as to what steps those might be and prescribes no penalties for non-compliance.

Strangely, no mention is made of potential default on the part of standards bodies. Such matters and all other matters of implementation are left to SAQA to deal with through the formulation of policies and criteria (section 5(1)(a)(ii)), or in proposing regulations for the Ministers' approval (section 14).

20. The Department of Education has serious misgivings about the fact that, six years down the line, all matters of substance relating to the implementation of the NOF are still relegated to subsidiary legislation (regulations), or "policies and criteria" whose legal force is indistinct and may be open to challenge. The DoE also considers it anomalous that a statutory body has the power to make regulations, subject to Ministerial approval. In the Department's view, the power to make regulations under the Act should belong to the Ministers. The implication of these views is that the SAQA Act needs to be substantially amended or replaced.⁽¹⁾

21. The provisions relating to SAQA's fee charging powers are circuitous. Section (10)(1)(b) provides that SAQA's funds include *inter alia* "moneys received by the Authority by virtue of the regulations made in terms of section 14". Section 14(b) empowers SAQA, with the approval of the Minister, to make regulations in respect of matters referred to in section 10(5)(a) and (b). These in turn relate to SAQA's power to charge or waive fees for accreditation or registration. The upshot appears to be that if SAQA wishes to charge fees it must do so in terms of regulations. The NSB Regulations make no provision for fee charging. (reg. 26) The ETQA Regulations provide that ETQAs wishing to charge or waive fees using powers delegated by SAQA must do so in terms of a business plan. (reg. 10) It would appear that regulations have not been made to cover SAQA's own fee charges or waivers.

National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996)

Objectives

22. The National Education Policy Bill was introduced in Parliament at the same time as the SAQA Bill, but given Presidential assent only the following year after successfully weathering a referral to the Constitutional Court. The Preamble sets out the political intention of the Act:

"Whereas it is necessary to adopt legislation for the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all the people of South Africa and upholds their fundamental rights, Be it therefore enacted by the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, as follows...."

23. The objectives are to provide for the determination of national education policy by the Minister in accordance with certain principles, the consultations the Minister must undertake before determining policy, the establishment of the CEM, HEDCOM and sectoral consultative bodies, the publication and implementation of policy, and a monitoring and evaluation system. (section 2)

Comment

24. NEPA heralded a new educational dispensation based on fundamental human rights, a set of directive principles, and democratic consultative processes. It was the first law to regulate relations between the national and provincial governments in any functional sphere. The burden of the constitutional challenge related to that matter and the Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the Bill.⁽²⁾

25. In a recent case the Constitutional Court has held that NEPA gives the Minister powers to determine policy but not to impose binding law.⁽³⁾

NEPA's scope

26. NEPA applies only to education below the higher education level. Education is defined to include "any education and training provided by an education institution, other than training as defined in section 1 of the Manpower Act, 1981" (section 1(vi),(viii))

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27. The following item is part of a long list of matters on which the Minister of Education may determine policy:

“curriculum frameworks, core syllabuses and education programmes, learning standards, examinations and certification of qualifications, subject to the provisions of any law establishing a national qualifications framework or a certifying or accrediting body”. (section 3(4)(l))

Comment

28. Higher education was specifically excluded after consultation with the CUP and CTP who argued that it would be improper to enact legislation affecting higher education before the National Commission on Higher Education had reported. The DoE and the Minister agreed.

29. The Manpower Act (subsequently repealed by the Skills Development Act, 1998) had been assigned by Presidential Proclamation to the portfolio of the Minister of Labour, hence the area of training in terms of that Act was excluded from the scope of the Minister of Education’s policy remit.

30. Section 3(4)(l) makes all the Minister’s policies on general and further education curriculum, standards, assessment and certification subject to the SAQA Act, 1995. The GENFETQA Act, 2001 somewhat complicates this arrangement (see below).

Mine Health and Safety Act, 1996 (Act No. 29 of 1996)

Mining Qualifications Authority

31. The long title of the Act includes an item “to promote training and human resource development”, but section 1 on “Objects of the Act” refers only to promoting “training in health and safety in the mining industry”. Nevertheless, chapter 4 of the Act establishes two “tripartite institutions”, the Mine Health and Safety Council and the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA). The MQA is established to advise the Minister of Minerals and Energy on:

- “(a) the creation of a framework for qualifications and learning achievements in the mining industry to improve health and safety standards through proper training and education;
- (b) standards and competency setting, assessment, examinations, quality assurance and accreditation in the mining industry; and
- (c) linking the qualifications framework for the mining industry to the National Qualifications Framework referred to in the SAQA Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995)” (section 41)

Comment

32. The establishment of the MQA was piggy-backed on the Mine Health and Safety Bill. In the early 1990s, mining sector employers and labour union activists were enthusiastic advocates of the NQF concept and took a leading role in the debates on the conceptualisation of the NQF in the National Training Strategy Initiative, the ANC/CEPD education and training policy process, and (after the 1994 election) in the Inter-Ministerial Working Group. The MQA represents a unique sectoral application of NQF ideas and anticipates several aspects of the SETAs.

MQA governance and functions

33. As a tripartite institution, the MQA comprises five members representing owners in the mining industry, five members representing employees in the mining industry, four members representing departments of State, and the Chief Inspector of Mines (chairperson). Members are appointed by the Minister of Minerals and Energy according to the MQA Constitution.⁽⁴⁾

34. The MQA’s Constitution elaborates its objects and functions. Its objects include promoting the five objectives of the NQF in the mining industry, and in order to promote its objects the MQA must seek registration with SAQA as a body responsible for generating education and training standards and qualifications, and accreditation as a body responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements. (section 3)

35. The MQA's functions are spelled out as follows:

"The Authority must –

1. generate education and training standards and qualifications in the mining industry;
2. propose education and training standards and qualifications to bodies registered with SAQA and responsible for developing education and training standards;
3. monitor and audit achievements in terms of those standards and qualifications;
4. accredit providers, assessors and moderators of education and training in the mining industry;
5. analyse and prioritise education and training needs in the mining industry and recommend on the provision of such training;
6. promote a culture of learning in the mining industry;
7. assure the quality of education and training in the mining industry without itself being a provider of education and training;
8. facilitate strategic human resources development planning in the mining industry;
9. liaise with the SAQA, or other bodies, persons or institutions concerned with or directly affected by education and training in the mining industry;
10. keep a record of learning for people in the mining industry;
11. perform any other function required by the SAQA in terms of the Authority's registration or accreditation; and
12. perform any other function that must be performed by the Authority in terms of this Act or any other applicable law." (section 4(1))

Comment

36. The Skills Development Bill, 1998 was introduced Parliament at about the same time that the MQA Constitution was gazetted. The detailed objects and functions of the MQA are highly compatible with some of the language of the SDA. This is especially the case in relation to promoting the objectives of the NQF, and the role envisaged for a SETA in terms of the SDA (except that the MQA is required to apply to SAQA to be both an SGB and an ETQA). However, the MQA is explicitly given standards setting powers in addition to quality assurance powers, which SETAs do not have and SAQA's regulations forbid. ETQAs may only "recommend" new standards or qualifications to NSBs.⁽⁵⁾

37. Function 12 under section 4 of the MQA Constitution requires the MQA to perform any other function that must be performed by the Authority in terms of this Act or any other applicable law. On the face of it, this would appear to include accepting an appropriate delegation from the HEQC or the GENFETQA in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997 or the GENFETQA Act, 2001.

Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) as amended

"To provide higher education"

38. The Higher Education Act, 1997 was developed simultaneously with Education White Paper 3, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997). Both result from an intensive consultative process following the report of the National Commission on Higher Education (1996). The organising concept of all three documents is that South African Higher Education needs to be unified into a single co-ordinated system.

39. The preamble to the Act states:

"Whereas it is desirable to establish a single co-ordinated higher education system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based higher education; restructure and transform programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource needs of the Republic; ...contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge, in keeping with international standards of academic quality; and whereas it is desirable for higher education institutions to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the State within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge..."

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40. The Higher Education Amendment Act, 2000 inserted a new definition of “to provide higher education”:

- “(a) The registering of students for-
- (i) complete qualifications at or above level 5 of the NQF as contemplated in the SAQA Act...; or
 - (ii) such part of a qualification which meets the requirements of a unit standard as recognised by SAQA at or above the level referred to in subparagraph (i);
- (b) the taking of responsibility for the provision and delivery of the curricula;
- (c) the assessment of students regarding their learning programmes; and
- (d) the conferring of qualifications, in the name of the institution concerned.” (section 1)

Comment

41. The preamble facilitates the identification of Higher Education as a unified sector of provision defined in terms of its “band” location on the NQF between levels 5 and 8. It is striking that the HE Act makes no explicit reference to the promotion of the NQF, although the objects of the Act are consistent with the objectives of the NQF. The definitions of “higher education”, “higher education institution” and “to provide higher education” (section 1) must be read together in order to have a full understanding of the scope of the Act. The definitions are not fully consistent with similar or comparable definitions in other legislation, including the FET Act, 1998, which has significant implications for matters such as the registration and accreditation of private institutions.

Quality promotion and quality assurance

42. The objectives of the Higher Education Act include quality promotion and quality assurance in higher education institutions. The Council on Higher Education is a statutory advisory body to the Minister of Education. It may advise the Minister on any matter at its own initiative, but if the Minister asks for advice on a number of matters listed in the Act (including “quality promotion and quality assurance”) the Council can’t refuse. (section 5(1), (2))

43. The CHE is required to establish the Higher Education Quality Committee as “a permanent committee to perform the quality promotion and quality assurance functions of the CHE in terms of this Act”. The CHE and HEQC are required to “comply with the policies and criteria formulated by SAQA in terms of section 5(1)(a)(ii)” of the SAQA Act. The HEQC may, with the concurrence of the CHE, delegate any quality promotion or quality assurance function “to other appropriate bodies capable of performing such functions”. The Minister is required to make regulations to give effect to quality promotion and quality assurance under the HE Act. (section 7)

44. In 2001 Parliament amended the Higher Education Act. The following provision was inserted:

“The Higher Education Quality Committee is deemed to be accredited by SAQA as an Education and Training Quality Assurance body primarily responsible for higher education.” (new section 7(1A))

45. The Certification Council for Technikon Education Act, 1986 has been repealed, and SERTEC’s responsibilities will now be undertaken by the HEQC. The quality assurance of agricultural colleges, previously undertaken by SERTEC, will now fall under the CHE.

Comment

46. The CHE had already been accredited by SAQA as an ETQA, following a formal application and assessment. The subsequent deeming of the HEQC as an ETQA has been done in order to create legislative consistency between the Ministry of Education’s two band ETQAs. The GENFETQA Act, 2001 contains a similar provision (see below). The deeming provision in the Higher Education Act does not detract from the duty of the CHE and HEQC to comply with SAQA’s policies and criteria for ETQAs. (section 7(2))

47. The Minister’s regulations on quality promotion and quality assurance in higher education have not yet been promulgated. (section 7(6))

Policy

48. The Act requires the Minister to determine higher education policy after consulting the CHE. Such policy must be gazetted and tabled in Parliament. (section 3 (1), (2)) The Act was amended in 2000 by the addition of the following provision:

The Minister may, in terms of the policy contemplated in subsection (1) and in the interest of the higher education system as a whole, determine the scope and range of operations of –

- (a) public higher education institutions;
- (b) private higher education institutions; and
- (c) individual public or private higher education institutions. (section 3(3))

49. The Act also requires the Minister, after consulting the CHE and with the concurrence of the Minister of Finance, to determine policy on the funding of public higher education, including appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities, and publish such policy in the *Government Gazette*. Subject to such policy he must “allocate public funds to public institutions on a fair and transparent basis” and impose

“any reasonable condition in respect of an allocation...and different conditions in respect of different public higher education institutions, different instructional programmes or different allocations, if there is a reasonable basis for such differentiation”. (section 39)

Comment

50. There is no doubt that the Minister is empowered to determine academic policy for the sector. SAQA is empowered by the SAQA Act, 1995 to formulate “policies and criteria” for the registration of standards bodies and ETQAs without reference to the Minister, and the CHE and HEQC are obliged to comply. What happens if the Minister’s policy and SAQA’s policy conflict? This will be discussed below.⁽⁶⁾

51. The amendment cited in para. 48 appears to give extraordinary power to the Minister to determine the size and academic shape of public provision, private provision, or any institution in either camp. That was certainly the intention. The Ministry, having taken the advice of the CHE, has embarked on a sweeping reconfiguration of the public higher education system. This was foreshadowed in the 1997 White Paper. The Act provides elsewhere for the merger of public institutions, and the funding provisions permit the application of financial incentives and disincentives in support of programme changes decided in the triennial planning cycle.

52. Private institutions receive no public subsidies and the Act makes no provision for them. Nevertheless, section 3(3) empowers the Minister – “in terms of” his published higher education policy, not as part of the policy – to determine the “scope and range of operations” of any or all private institutions. Ministerial statements leave little doubt that the intention is to protect a vulnerable, re-organising public higher education sector from cherry-picking private providers. Section 3(3) or its application has not yet been challenged in Court. It seems possible that the argument employed in the recent Constitutional Court judgement (that Ministerial policy under NEPA does not have the force of law) would not apply to Ministerial actions under section 3(3) of the Higher Education Act, provided that he proceeded by regulation and not simply by notice. In any Court challenge to his actions the Minister would be required to show that he had acted reasonably, after due consideration, on the basis of evidence, not arbitrarily, in pursuance of a publicly defensible objective and not prejudicially. The Act is silent on the criteria the Minister must apply, other than that he must make his determination “in the interest of the higher education system as a whole”.

53. This may not seem to have much to do with the NQF. However, if the Minister (acting under section 3(3)) prevented certain private institutions from offering certain programmes, some SETAs’ work on skills development in terms of learnerships might be affected.

Appendix D

54. Both public and private higher education providers are essential players in the implementation of the National Skills Development Strategy and the national HRD Strategy. The SETAs are embarking on provider accreditation and many if not all skills development plans anticipate substantial participation by private providers. It remains to be seen how such considerations will be connected with “the interest of the higher education system as a whole” if and when the Minister of Education acts in terms of section 3(3) of the Act. The question is whether the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour (the joint sponsors of the NQF, national HRD Strategy and learnership programme), will have the same views on labour market needs and the demand and supply of skills.

Private institutions

55. Chapter 7 of the Act deals with the registration of private higher education institutions. The Director-General is the registrar. No (legal) person other than a public HE institution or an organ of state may provide higher education unless that person is registered under the Higher Education Act and under the Companies Act, 1973.

56. Registration may be granted if the applicant:

- “(a) is financially capable of satisfying its obligations to prospective students;
- (b) with regard to all of its higher education programmes-
 - (i) will maintain acceptable standards that are not inferior to standards at a comparable public institution;
 - (ii) will comply with the requirements of the appropriate quality assurance body accredited by SAQA in terms of the SAQA Act, 1995; and
- (c) complies with any other reasonable requirement prescribed by the Minister.” (section 53)

57. The registrar may impose any reasonable condition on a private HE institution in terms of its registration. (section 60) Provisional registration may be granted if the registrar believes that the applicant will be able to meet the requirements within a reasonable period. (section 54(3)) Registration is not time-limited but the registrar may cancel an institution’s registration on reasonable grounds. Provision is made for appeals to the Minister. (section 64)

Comment

58. The DoE has thus far conducted the registration of HE institutions on the basis of a constantly evolving manual. The experience has been difficult and often exasperating for the Department and providers alike. In 2001 draft regulations were prepared and published for public comment. Revision is almost complete. When the regulations are published the registration process will for the first time be on a clear legal footing. However three related issues will persist:

(1) Quality assessment as a component of the registration process. Section 53 of the Act makes it clear that registration can only be granted if an applicant meets quality criteria. In this the Act follows the Constitution. Section 29(3) accords any person the right to establish and maintain a private institution at own expense provided it is registered with the state, does not discriminate on grounds of race, and maintains standards that are not inferior to those of a comparable public institution. DoE decided that section 53 of the Act required applicants to be accredited prior to registration. SAQA agreed to take on the job, declared itself a (provisional) ETQA for higher education in the absence of the HEQC and called in SERTEC to make the assessments. Provisional accreditations were awarded (or not). The process pleased no one, delay was chronic and many decisions were disputed. Last year an argument was made against the process, on the main ground that accreditation was not a pre-requisite for registration but rather the reverse. This position is now formally accepted but the problem of managing the quality test remains. By arrangement between DoE and HEQC applicants for registration apply simultaneously to the HEQC for accreditation.⁽⁷⁾

(2) The relationship if any between registration with DoE and accreditation by a SETA or other ETQA. In 2001 the SETA (ETQA) Forum offered to run a one-stop shop for FET (and higher?) provider accreditation and registration. With the establishment of NSDS targets they (and many providers) were extremely worried about the complexity, cost and length of the registration process, the uncertainty about outcomes, and the overlap with their provider accreditation process. DoE declined the offer. The Registrar is not empowered to delegate his functions. Besides, it was explained, registration and accreditation serve two different functions. Registration is a licence to operate, granted if consumer protection tests are met. Accreditation is a certificate of quality performance against recognised standards. In many minds this is a distinction without a difference. The problems remain.

(3) The relationship, if any, between the DoE's regulatory policy on private provision and the national HRD Strategy. We encountered this issue in discussing the Minister's power to determine the scope and operational range of public and private provision of higher education in terms of his HE policy. The same issue is implicit in the Act's registration requirement. The Registrar is not required to take the nation's education and skills needs into account in making registration decisions, though it is not precluded. There is no explicit DoE policy on the matter. The National Plan for Higher Education deals with private provision only in a brief section on the necessity to control educationally unsound partnerships between public and private institutions.⁽⁸⁾

59. In the matter of private HE provision the DoE tends to act solely as a regulator. It is a role the Department takes very seriously, and the Minister maintains an active interest and involvement. The Constitution requires private institutions to be registered with the state. The South African Schools Act, the Higher Education Act and the FET Act accordingly all make provision for registration. Anyone who operates an unregistered institution commits an offence and is liable to prosecution.

60. By managing the registration process over the past three to four years the Higher Education Branch has gained intimate knowledge of many aspects of the sector. Registered institutions cover the gamut from offshore Australian degree campuses to beauty and bible colleges. The great majority of private institutions are not remotely similar to the universities and technikons in the public sector. They are small career colleges with a single occupational focus. Neither the White Paper on Higher Education nor any other DoE document treats this type of institution as a distinct segment of the sector nor evaluates its role in national human resource development. It is unlikely that any of the capable staff of the Branch has studied or worked in an institution of this kind. Their chief preoccupation, as in any conscientious licensing agency, is to ensure that the public will not be ripped off.

61. The conceptual and statutory approach of the Department of Labour, the SETAs and SAQA toward private *providers* appears to be strikingly different from the Department of Education's and, from the private provider's perspective, on the whole more familiar and more amenable.

62. The NQF is meant to provide a framework that binds the whole national learning system together. In principle the NQF applies only to registered institutions or providers. In practice, ETQAs (especially the HEQC) have close-quarter engagement with unregistered providers, largely because of the extreme scarcity of professionals capable of handling the quality assessment on which the DoE's registration decisions depend. In this complex web of overlapping relationships and obligations, what is lacking is a common strategic perspective on private provision and a mutually acceptable definition of roles.

"Application of the Act when in conflict with other laws"

63. "This Act prevails over any other law dealing with higher education other than the Constitution." (section 70)⁽⁹⁾

Comment

64. This provision is intended to defend the national policy, expressed in Education White Paper 3, of a single co-ordinated, transforming higher education system. It applies when another law contradicts the HE Act. The HE Act does not expunge the offending provision in the other law, but that provision is of no effect so long as the

Appendix D

contradiction remains. Despite the term “primacy” having been bandied about in connection with the CHE/HEQC in the debate on the roles of ETQAs, this provision in the HE Act has not yet been used in order to nullify the effect of another law. It is noteworthy that the HE sector is the only part of the education and training system that has received legislative protection of this kind. Apart from the quality assurance role of the CHE/HEQC, one would expect that any challenge to a competing statute would relate to the authority of the senate of a higher education institution with respect to curriculum, assessment and certification. (sections 1, 28, 32). The prerogatives of higher education institutions have been examined from another viewpoint, the constitutional protection of academic freedom (Constitution, section 16(1)). An argument has been made that certain SAQA directives have limited academic freedom in an unconstitutional manner.⁽¹⁰⁾

Further Education and Training Act, 1998 (No. 98 of 1998)

Purpose

65. The purpose of the Act is “to establish a national co-ordinated further education and training system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based further education and training”. (section 2) The preamble to the Act refers to the desirability of providing “optimal opportunities for learning, the creation of knowledge and the development of intermediate to high level skills in keeping with international standards of academic and technical quality”. There are references to ensuring access to further education, work and higher education, to transforming programmes in order to respond better to the HR, economic and development needs of the country, the labour market and development needs of communities served by the institutions, to advancing strategic priorities determined by national policy objectives, to pursuing excellence, and notably to complement the Skills Development Strategy in co-operation with the Department of Labour.

Comment

66. The design of the Act is closely modeled on the Higher Education Act, but with the significant difference that FET is a provincial competence.

67. Neither the preamble nor the “purpose” section makes reference to the NQF. There is no provision relating to the Act prevailing over another Act in case of conflict between them.

Quality assurance and promotion

68. Section 38 provides that:

“Subject to the norms and standards set by the Minister in terms of section 3 of the National Education Policy Act, 1996...and by SAQA, the Director-General must –

- (a) promote quality assurance in further education and training; and
- (b) assess and report on the quality of education and training provided at further education and training institutions.” (section 38)

Comment

69. The Further Education White Paper anticipated a FETQA, but policy had not matured sufficiently to include it in the Act. Ultimately a GENFETQA was approved and legislated separately (see below).

Private institutions

70. Chapter 5 deals with the registration of private FET institutions, in very similar terms to the Higher Education Act. Despite FET being a provincial competence, the registration of private FET institutions is made a responsibility of the Director-General in the national department.

Comment

71. HEDCOM and CEM agreed that the provincial departments should not handle private registrations. Questions of capacity loomed large. Also it was known that a substantial number of private institutions operated across provinces.

72. However, in three years the Department has not yet established a registration process for private FET institutions. The Act made provision for existing institutions to be exempt from registration until a date determined by the Minister. (section 51) An amendment to the Act in 2000 extended the exemption to all private FET institutions, old and new. Meanwhile, the implications of registering private FET providers has preoccupied the FET Branch. Files of documents have been created and frequent consultations held with APPEDT, the SETAs, DoL, SAFCERT and the Higher Education Branch. In 2001 the FET Branch launched a pre-registration survey, with the intention of establishing a ballpark figure of private FET institutions and their distribution and size, as a basis for estimating the administrative burden of registration and devising options for implementation.

73. 896 institutions pre-registered. 266 operated multiple sites across provinces. The total number of sites was 4 254, of which 3 556 were in only three provinces: 2 368 in Gauteng, 801 in KZN and 387 in the Western Cape. The total headcount enrolment in 200 was 721 077, of which 41 per cent represented headcount enrolment in higher education programmes.⁽¹¹⁾

74. The FET Branch is engaged in devising an operational plan for registration in consultation with the HE Branch. The capacity issue is an acute constraint in the FET Branch. Apart from the line managers, this matter is being handled full-time at present by one professional officer and one assistant, with a little bit of help from the in-house consultant.

75. The issues discussed in relation to registration of private higher education institutions apply to the FET situation, with considerable interest.

Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998)

Purposes

76. The purposes of the Act are to develop the skills of the South African workforce, increase the levels of investment in education and training in the labour market and improve the return on that investment, to encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment, provide employees with the opportunities to learn new skills, new entrants to the labour market to gain work experience, and so on. The Act seeks to ensure the quality of education and training in and for the workplace.

77. These and the other purposes are to be achieved by

- establishing an institutional and financial framework comprising the NSA, the NSF, a levy-grant scheme, SETAs, labour centres and the Skills Development Planning Unit
- “encouraging partnerships between the public and private sectors of the economy to provide education and training in and for the workplace; and
- co-operating with the SAQA.” (section 2)

78. Any person applying this Act must interpret its provisions to give effect to its purposes and “the objects of the South African Qualifications Authority”. (section 3)

Comment

79. This statement is focussed and businesslike and displays strategic intent. Co-operation and support for the objects of SAQA are up-front.

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National Skills Authority (NSA)

80. The NSA is established to advise the Minister on the national skills development policy and strategy, and to liaise with the SETAs. It comprises 24 voting and three non-voting members. Of the 24, 15 (five each) represent the three constituencies in the National Economic Development and Labour Advisory Council (NEDLAC), organised labour, organised business and community and development interests respectively, five represent the interests of the state and four represent education and training providers. SAQA nominates one non-voting member. The Minister appoints all members, voting and non-voting. (section 6)

Comment

81. The appointment of a SAQA representative as a non-voting member of the NSA reflects the intimate relationship between the purposes of the Skills Development Act and the implementation of the NQF, as the following sections illustrate.

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)

82. Each SETA may consist only of members representing organised labour, organised employers, relevant government departments and, with Ministerial approval, any interested professional body or bargaining council with jurisdiction in the area. (section 11) A SETA is established to develop sector skills plans, promote learnerships, register learnership agreements, collect and disburse skills development levies in its sector, liaise with the NSA, with employment services and education and training providers. Within a week of its establishment a SETA must apply to SAQA for accreditation as an ETQA “and must, within 18 months from the date of that application, be so accredited”. (section 10(1)(e))

Comment

83. As mentioned earlier, the requirement that a SETA must be accredited within 18 months of application was probably intended as a strong incentive to SETAs to meet SAQA's criteria, but could be interpreted as a duty laid on SAQA to accredit SETAs within that deadline regardless of their state of readiness.

Learnerships

84. Learnerships established by a SETA comprise a structured learning component and practical work experience and must lead to a national qualification registered by SAQA and related to an occupation. (section 16) A learnership agreement must be entered into by a learner, an employer and a training provider accredited by an ETQA. (section 17(1))

Comment

85. The accreditation requirement means that the entire learnership programme is dependent upon ETQAs being in business and undertaking sufficient provider accreditations. Since registration with the DoE is a pre-requisite for accreditation, in terms of SAQA's ETQA Regulations, 1998 (reg. 13(a)) it is clear that DoE's registration process is a vital external factor in the implementation of DoL's skills development strategy.

Council for the Built Environment Act, 2000 (Act No. 43 of 2000)

Architectural Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 44 of 2000)

Landscape Architectural Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 45 of 2000)

Engineering Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 46 of 2000)

Property Valuers Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 47 of 2000)

Project and Construction Management Professions Act, 2000 (Act No. 48 of 2000)

Quantity Surveying Profession Act, 2000 (Act No. 49 of 2000)

Professional councils

86. This cluster of Acts, developed by the Ministry of Public Works, is intended to bring uniformity into the statutory management of the built environment professions. Apart from the Council for the Built Environment Act, which establishes an umbrella body, each of the Acts is to all intents and purposes identical.

87. The Council for the Built Environment, among other objects, is to

“promote ongoing human resource development in the built environment;...
 promote liaison in the built environment in the field of training...and...promote the standards of such training in the Republic;
 “serve as a forum where the representatives of the built environment professions may discuss the relevant-
 (i) required qualifications;
 (ii) standards of education;
 (iii) training and competence;...” (section 3)

88. Among its functions, the Council, in consultation with the councils for the professions, must obtain recognition for the councils “as bodies responsible for the establishment of education and training standards” in terms of the SAQA Act, 1995, and must promote coordination between the CHE and the councils for the professions in respect of the accreditation of education institutions. (section 4(n), (p))

89. Taking the Architectural Profession Act, 2000 as an example, the professional councils are empowered, subject to the provisions of the Higher Education Act, 1997 to conduct accreditation visits to any educational institution which has a school or faculty in the relevant discipline, grant or refuse accreditation, consult with the CHE on matters relevant to education in the profession, consult with SAQA or any SAQA sub-structure and the voluntary professional associations to develop competency standards for the profession, and liaise with the relevant NSB with a view to establishing an SGB.(section 13(a)-(f))

Comment

90. These Acts situate the educational interests of the relevant professions entirely within the legislative schemes of the NQF and the Higher Education Act respectively.

Adult Basic Education and Training Act, 2000 (Act No. 52 of 2000)

Purpose

91. The Preamble of the ABET Act announces that it is intended to establish a “national co-ordinated adult basic education and training system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based adult basic education and training. It is intended to restructure and transform adult education centres, ensure access to ABET and the workplace, respond to the needs of the country and the labour market and “complement the Skills Development Strategy in co-operation with the Department of Labour”.

92. The Act provides for the establishment, governance and funding of public adult education centres and the registration of private centres. It also provides for quality assurance and promotion, which must be undertaken “as contemplated in the South African Certification Council Act, 1986” (Act No. 85 of 1986). The National Advisory Board for Adult Education (NABABET), established in terms of NEPA, must advise the Minister on quality assurance and promotion and give him an annual report on the quality of adult basic education and training.

Comment

93. Despite the references to the labour market and National Skills Development Strategy in the Preamble, this Act is modelled on the South African Schools Act, 1996 with respect to adult education centres, and on the FET Act with respect to NABABET. The controlling policy influence is the National Education Policy Act, 1996. The Act lays emphasis on quality promotion and assurance without reference to the SAQA Act or the ETQA Regulations, but by making reference to SAFCERT, the Act in fact places adult education centres under GENFETQA's direct influence, since GENFETQA is the successor to SAFCERT.

94. Remarkably, the Act makes no reference to the NQF or SAQA, except that ABET is defined in terms of the NQF. However, the draft regulations setting up NABABET provide for a stakeholder body of 29 members on which a representative of SAQA will sit as a voting member.⁽¹²⁾

General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, 2001 (Act No. 58 of 2001)

Objects and application

95. The long title of the Act states that it provides for the establishment of the GENFETQA Council, for quality assurance in GET and FET, for “control over norms and standards of curriculum and assessment,” the issue of certificates at the exit points, the conduct of assessment, and the repeal of the SAFCERT Act, 1986. The Preamble notes that quality assurance in terms of standards and qualifications registered on the NQF is the responsibility of bodies accredited by SAQA and asserts the need for such a body to be the quality assurer for the GET and FET bands.

96. The Act applies to “all education institutions...established, declared or registered” under SASA, 1996 the FET Act, 1998 and the ABET Act, 2000. The objects are to establish the council, develop a quality assurance framework for the two bands, and “regulate the relationship” between the national DoE, SAQA, other ETQAs, providers and the GENFETQA council. (sections 2-3)

Comment

97. The Act is positioned squarely within the NQF environment, but the strains in that environment are reflected in the expressed need to “regulate the relationship” between GENFETQA and the other parties.

98. The GENFETQA Council's mandate is very broad, covering not only QA but curriculum and assessment norms and standards, as well as the certification function.

Accreditation as ETQA

99. “The Council must be regarded as having been accredited by SAQA in terms of section 5(1)(b)(i) of the SAQA Act, 1995....” (section 5)

100. Under the “functions of Council”, the Council is required to meet the criteria for accreditation and perform the functions of an ETQA but no time limit is set. With the approval of the Minister and SAQA it may assume its functions progressively depending on its capacity.(section 16(2), (3))

Comment

101. Section 5 is the “deeming” provision that was so strongly contested by DoL and SAQA during the consultations on the Bill. The DoE's position was described earlier in relation to a similar provision in the Higher Education Act, 1997 as amended.

102. A late drafting error when the Bill was in the hands of the Parliamentary Draughtsperson inserted the wrong function in section 5. Instead of being accredited as a quality assurance body, GENFETQA is accredited “as the body responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications” for GET and FET. The error will be corrected by an amendment to the Act in the 2002 session of Parliament.

103. The concept of progressive assumption of ETQA functions in this law is novel and has no counterpart in other Acts.

Accreditation of providers

104. A provider is defined as any body that delivers learning programmes which culminate in a specified NQF standard or qualification, but the Act distinguishes between public and private provision. In respect of public schools, public FET institutions and public ABET centres, the “provider is the provincial education department”. (section 1) Every provincial education department “must be regarded as having been accredited” by SAQA in terms of section 5(1)(b)(i) of the SAQA Act, 1995. The council must develop accreditation criteria that are to be embodied in “binding policy” under NEPA, and each provincial department is put under an obligation to comply.

In the event of non-compliance the provisions of section 8 of NEPA will apply. This governs the responsibility of DoE to monitor and assist provincial education departments if there is a breach of norms and standards. However, in this case the GENFETQA Council is the monitoring authority and must advise the Minister of non-compliance by a provincial department. (section 22)

105. Private providers are defined in the Act as the institutions themselves. They likewise will be placed under “binding policy” with respect to accreditation criteria. (section 23)

Comment

106. These unusual arrangements stem from the Minister’s decision that it would be intolerable for public institutions to be placed under an obligation to submit to accreditation by the GENFETQA Council. The Minister’s view is that public institutions are established and maintained by the state in fulfilment of a constitutional mandate. The national and provincial departments of education are engaged in a multitude of efforts to improve the quality of provision and these will continue. The implications of a decision by the Council not to accredit a public institution would be incalculable. However, it is accepted that the provider system, represented by the provincial departments, should be placed under the discipline of quality management.

107. The references to “binding policy” in the Act are intended to give the force of law to Ministerial policy determined under NEPA, in the light of the recent Constitutional Court judgement reported earlier.

Delegation

108. The Act provides that the GENFETQA Council may delegate any quality promotion and quality assurance function under the Act to “any appropriate” ETQA. (section 28(2))

Comment

109. This power of delegation is the way in which the Act regulates GENFETQA’s relations with other ETQAs. It is apparent that, with respect to GENFETQA’s scope of authority, this Act places the GENFETQA Council in the driving seat. This provision trumps the provisions relating to ETQA delegations in the ETQA Regulations. These allow an ETQA to delegate selected functions to a constituent provider or “other body” with the prior approval of SAQA. (reg. 9(2))

Endnotes

- (1) The Ministers have approved two sets of regulations: NSB Regulations (R. 452 of 28 March 1998) and ETQA Regulations (R. 1127 of 8 September 1998). Nine “criteria and guideline” documents have been published by the Authority, on the registration of assessors, quality management systems for providers, assessment of NQF registered unit standards, accreditation of providers, quality management systems for ETQAs, SGB funding, submission of existing qualifications for interim registration, evaluating qualifications and unit standards, and accreditation of ETQAs.
- (2) Constitutional Court of South Africa, *Dispute Concerning the Constitutionality of Certain Provisions of the National Education Policy Bill*, No. 83 of 1995. CCT 46/95, 3 April 1996.
- (3) Constitutional Court of South Africa, *Minister of Education v Harris*, CCT 13/01, 5 October 2001.
- (4) Promulgated by the Minister of Minerals and Energy as Schedule 7 to the Act on 24 April 1998 (No. R. 612).
- (5) ETQA Regulations, reg. 9(1)(h).
- (6) SAQA Act, section 5(a)(ii).
- (7) TC, “Rethinking the registration of private FET and higher education institutions,” discussion document, Department of Education, 8 August 2000.
- (8) Trevor Coombe, “Thoughts on public policy toward private provision of education and training,” delivered to the 13th Annual IPM/APPETD HRD Education and Training Conference, Boksburg, 12 July 2001.
- (9) The same heading and concept appears in the Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No. 66 of 1995): “If any conflict, relating to the matters dealt with in this Act, arises between this Act and the provisions of any other law save the Constitution or any Act expressly amending this Act, the provisions of this Act will prevail.” (section 210)
- (10) R Malherbe and S Berkhout, “The national qualifications framework and the unconstitutional limitation of academic freedom,” *South African Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 15, No. 2, at <http://www.saardhe.ac.za/sajhe/01152p0.html>.
- (11) DoE, “Private Further Education and Training Institutions: Pre-Registration Report,” 2001.
- (12) Reg. 5 in the draft Regulations; “Call for Comments on the Regulations to Provide for the Establishment, Composition and Financing of the National Advisory Board for Adult Basic Education and Training,” *Government Gazette*, Notice No. 1850 of 2001 (15 August 2001).

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Industry Council of South Africa
Alliance of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development
Association of Further Education and Training Institutions of South Africa
Brimer, Professor Alan, retired Academic Registrar, University of Durban-Westville
Business South Africa
Committee of Technikon Principals
Congress of South African Trade Unions
Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee
Department of Education
Department of Labour
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Engineering Council of South Africa
Interim ABET Advisory Body
National Access Consortium Western Cape
National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
National Skills Authority
National Standards Bodies

- NSB 01 (Agriculture and Nature Conservation)
- NSB 04 (Communication Studies and Language)
- NSB 07 (Human and Social Studies)
- NSB 09 (Health Sciences and Social Services)
- NSB 12 (Physical Planning and Construction)

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South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
South African Institute for Distance Education
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BODIES CONSULTED

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Appendix F

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Ministerial Project Committee for the Revised National Curriculum Statement R-9 (Schools)

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Mr L Mphahlele, Chief Education Specialist, Department of Education

Mr M Sekese, Chief Education Specialist, Department of Education

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Professor J Volmink, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Natal

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National African Federation of Chambers of Commerce

Ms C Nahlangu, NAFCOC Member

Mr R Wesigye, NAFCOC Member

National Skills Authority

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Mr M Ka Toni, NSA Member

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Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Education

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Mr L Mbadi, UDM

Ms N Mnandi, ANC

Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Labour

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Ms K du Toit, ETQA Manager, Services Sector Education and Training Authority

Mr V Hays, Deputy CEO, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Education and Training Authority

Ms N Patel, Learnerships/ETQA Manager, Financial and Accounting Services Education and Training Authority

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Mr A Matlole, Director

South African Institute of Chartered Accountants

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South African Nursing Council

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Ms G Ramadi, Deputy Registrar
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Mr C Moloto, Director: Information and Information Technology
Ms A Oberholzer, Director: Quality Assurance and Development
Mr J Samuels, Director: Standards Setting and Development
Ms Y Shapiro, NLRD Manager
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Dr E D Malaza, Director, Institutional Planning Department, University of Cape Town

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

The list is presented in the following order:

- South Africa
 - South African legislation
- ILO
- UNESCO
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- Pacific Islands
- Southern Africa
- Australia
- Canada
- Ireland
- Mexico
- Namibia
- New Zealand
- United Kingdom
 - Northern Ireland
 - Scotland
 - Wales
- United States
- General

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

[South African unless otherwise indicated]

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ACCAC	Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/ Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
ACTI	Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions
AEA	Accreditation, Equivalence and Articulation (Caribbean)
ANC	African National Congress
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
ANTA MINCO	ANTA Ministerial Council (Australia)
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQFAB	AQF Advisory Board (Australia)
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework (formerly Australian Recognition Framework)
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer (United Kingdom)
CBE	Council for the Built Environment
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)
CEEQ	Centre for the Evaluation of Educational Qualifications, SAQA
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development, Planning and Management
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CMEC	Council of Education Ministers, Canada
COLUMBUS	Collaboration on University Management: A bridge between Universities and Scholars in Europe and Latin America
CONOCER	Consejo de Normalización y Certificación de Competencia Laboral (Mexico) (Council for the Standardisation and Certification of Work Competencies)
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CQFW	Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales
CRE	Confederation of EU Rectors' Conferences and the Association of European Universities
CTF	Canadian Teachers' Federation
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
CUP	Committee of University Principals (see SAUVCA)
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualifications
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training (Australia)
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DSSD	Directorate: Standard Setting and Development, SAQA

Appendix H

ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ENIC/NARIC	European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres
enqa	European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ERIC	Education Research Information Centre (United States)
ERS	Education Renewal Strategy
ETF	European Training Foundation, Turin
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FLMM	Forum of Labour Market Ministries (Canada)
GENFETQA	General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council
GET	General Education and Training
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
GOSS-P	Generic Qualifications Standard Setting Project, SAUVCA/CTP
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH (German Corporation for Technical Co-operation)
HE(T)	Higher Education (and Training)
HEDCO	Higher Education for Development Cooperation (Ireland)
HEDCOM	Heads of Education Departments Committee
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (of the CHE)
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (United Kingdom)
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILC	International Labour Conference (ILO)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPET	Implementation Plan for Education and Training, CEPD
IPM	Institute of People Management
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	Information Technology
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Body (Australia)
ITO	Industry Training Organisation (New Zealand)
JIP	Joint Implementation Plan
K-12	Kindergarten-12th grade (United States and Canada)
LLWF	Learning for Life, Work and the Future (UNESCO and Botswana Ministry of Education)
LSDA	Learning and Skills Development Agency (United Kingdom)
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council of Ministers on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority

NABABET	National Board for Adult Basic Education and Training
NAFCOC	National African Federation of Chambers of Commerce
NBFET	National Board for Further Education and Training
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement (New Zealand)
NCEA	National Council for Educational Awards (Northern Ireland)
NECC	National Education Coordinating Committee
NEPA	National Education Policy Act, 1996
NEPAD	[The] New Partnership for Africa's Development
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation, NECC
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIACE	National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (United Kingdom)
NICATS	Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSB	National Standards Body
NSB (Māori)	National Standards Body (Māori) (New Zealand)
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSSB	National Skills Standards Board (United States)
NSSB	National Standards Setting Body (Namibia)
NTATT	National Training Agency of Trinidad and Tobago
NTB	National Training Board
NTO	National Training Organisation (United Kingdom)
NTSI	National Training Strategy Initiative
NUFFIC	Netherlands Organisation for International Co-operation in Higher Education
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZVCC	New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act, 1999
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (United Kingdom)
QAANZ	Quality Assurance Authority of New Zealand (proposed)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (England)
R-9	Reception year (grade R) – grade 9
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SABS	South African Bureau of Standards
SACTWU	South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAFCERT	South African Certification Council
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SAIP	School Achievement Indicators Programme (Canada)
SANAS	South African National Accreditation System

Appendix H

SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African University Vice-Chancellors' Association
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDA	Skills Development Act, 1998
SERTEC	Certification Council for Technikon Education
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SSC	Sector Skills Council (Canada)
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency (United Kingdom)
SVQ	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
TAFE	Technical and Further Education (Australia)
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission (New Zealand)
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVE(T)	Technical and Vocational Education (and Training)
UDM	United Democratic Movement
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNEVOC	UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Bonn
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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