Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations

General

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DoE	Department of Education
CARE	Centre for Applied Research in Education
CCFO	Critical Cross-Field Outcome
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DoL	Department of Labour
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
GET	General Education and Training
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
GSVQ	General Scottish Vocational Qualifications
HE	Higher Education
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework (draft, for discussion)
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
ICSA	The South Africa Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NATED	National Education Department Core Syllabus
NBFET	National Board for Further Education and Training
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification (England)
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QC	Qualifications and Quality Assurance Council (proposed)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RDP	Reconstruction and Developmental Programme
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAUVCA	South African Vice Chancellors' Association (now Higher Education South Africa, HESA)
SCOTCAT	Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
VET	Vocational Education and Training

SAQA

ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body

Editorial comment

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) hosted the First Annual National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Colloquium at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Convention Centre from 13 to 14 June 2005. The Colloquium was well attended with more than 150 key NQF stakeholders and partners participating. The purpose of the NQF Colloquium was to establish a joint forward-looking research agenda between SAQA and NQF stakeholders by encouraging debate on, and intellectual scrutiny of, topical NQF-related matters.

Three topics were debated over the day and a half:

NQFs and the FET/HE interface
Chaired by Saleem Badat (Council on Higher Education [CHE]), papers prepared by Peliwe Lolwana (Umalusi) and Hanlie Griesel (Higher Education South Africa [HESA])

NQFs as integrated frameworks
Chaired by Jayce Pillay (University of Johannesburg), papers prepared by David Raffe (University of Edinburgh) and Ronel Blom[1] (SAQA)

NQFs as Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems
Chaired by Vusi Mabena (Chamber of Mines), papers prepared by John Hart (International NQF expert) and Joe Samuels (SAQA)

Each of the sessions included ample time for group discussions on the various issues raised by the speakers. The group discussions were summarised by the chairpersons for each session. In the final session, the SAQA Chairperson, prof. Shirley Walters, provided an overview of the emerging research agenda, as discussed by participants. Three overarching focus areas emerged:

Communities of trust
Delegates discussed the extent to which the NQF contributes to the building of communities of trust (also referred to as communities of practice and zones of trust). It was noted that focused research was needed to improve the understanding of the concept. In this regard it was proposed that the *relationships between the NQF and pedagogically sound practices* requires attention. A concerted effort needs to be made in order to ensure that the NQF embodies internationally accepted best practices. Key issues that were discussed included: the extent to which qualifications should have a greater focus on content; the tension between an input-driven and supply-driven system; and the links between qualifications and curricula. It was also agreed that *different sectors interact with, and influence the NQF in different ways*. The significant influence of the higher education sector was noted, while the interaction with the vocational sector, FET providers and workplaces were also important. Another important point was that the NQF should be used as an instrument to *build the capability and capacity of institutions, sub-systems and individuals.*

Social purposes of the NQF
The second focus area originated from questions about whether the social purposes of the NQF were still the same: was it time to reconsider the original revolutionary and transformative purpose of the NQF? It was also agreed that the *"first principles" of the NQF* needed to be identified in order to make sure that the original vision was not abandoned. Progression and access and integration were suggested as two such first principles.

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[1] The paper presented by Ronel Blom was co-authored by Seamus Needham. The paper is not included in this *Bulletin* as it was published in the previous edition (November 2004) available at www.saqa.org.za

Prescriptiveness of the NQF

It was agreed that the initial tight prescriptiveness needed to make way for a looser system, that could still be managed tightly, but that would be more inclusive. It was also suggested that the impact of the NQF in transforming the education and training system needed to be further investigated to ensure that the most appropriate "methodology for change" is applied. The changing conditions and context within the South African system would have to be continually considered and used to inform decisions. This need to *evaluate and report on NQF development and implementation in a more detailed and "finely grained" manner* was well supported.

In the next few months SAQA will be initiating a number of related research projects in order to investigate the various issues raised at the First Annual NQF Colloquium. SAQA acknowledges the contribution of all participants and looks forward to reporting our findings at the next Colloquium scheduled for 2006.

The status of articles in the SAQA Bulletin

SAQA re-asserts its statement in previous issues of the *SAQA Bulletin* that only those parts of the text clearly flagged as decisions or summaries of decisions taken by the Authority should be seen as reflecting SAQA policy.

Chairperson's foreword

In 2003 the NQF Review made recommendations that would have far reaching effects on the NQF and the structures that govern it. The Ministers of Education and Labour have not yet responded to these recommendations. In the context of uncertainty that has been created by the delay, SAQA has decided to be proactive and has studied all the relevant documents produced in the last three years in order to ascertain trends in thinking on the likely future of the NQF. Informed by these trends, discussion at a recent Strategy Day led to the decision to move ahead by building ever closer working relationships amongst SAQA, the Council on Higher Education, Umalusi, the Departments of Education and Labour, and the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). We understand that the framework will need to be given substance by the key mandated agencies regardless of the eventual political decision on our structural relationships. The work has therefore begun to anticipate the pending decisions in the spirit of the slogan which SAQA is using for the year: "Cultivating hope and imagination for the future". This slogan will guide us as we re-visit the NQF's principles and the action needed to attain them.

The Report on the Second Cycle of the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005) shows universal acceptance of the NQF and its principles. The report indicates that the NQF has become an integral part of our lives in South Africa. This does not mean that there is universal acceptance of the ways it is implemented. Far from it. There are many areas that require substantial work to maximise its effectiveness. It is SAQA's role, as custodian of the NQF, to promote debate and discussion on ways to improve the workings of the NQF.

The first NQF Colloquium was one step towards deep and long-term improvement. By drawing together a range of local and international experts to discuss the most relevant NQF topics of the day, SAQA has shown that it is fulfilling its role and contributing to the further development of the social construct that is the NQF.

The debates, as reflected in the papers that have been included in this *Bulletin*, will push the boundaries of the NQF discourse in general, but most importantly, will contribute to the improved implementation of the South African NQF. In the 11th year of our democracy it is an appropriate time to re-visit the principles of the NQF, to re-affirm them, and to find new and more effective ways of achieving them.

Shirley Walters
South African Qualifications Authority
June 2005

**National Qualifications Frameworks and the Further Education and Training /
Higher Education interface**

Peliwe Lolwana
Umalusi

Introduction

My statutory responsibilities in Umalusi are essentially concerned with the quality of the outcomes of general and further education and training (GET and FET). These outcomes are by no means solely related to access to higher education (HE). The majority of young people in South Africa are not presently destined for HE, and their learning needs are not identical with the requirements of HE institutions. I will focus on the FET / HE interface, however, because that is what I have been asked to deal with. But in addition to this reason, the perspective from the FET / HE interface seems to me important for a number of reasons that are touched on in various parts of this paper. The first relates to the power of HE over the public valuing of learning. The second concerns the enduring power of existing institutions and the need to take this power into consideration when attempting to institute drastic changes in education and training provision. The third reason has the greatest professional interest to educators and trainers: the requirements of progression to HE prioritise learning achievements within established disciplines, or at least closely relevant to these disciplines. There would seem to be increasing evidence for the relevance of disciplinary knowledge beyond the academy, and an emerging critique of the emphasis on practical everyday skills to the virtual exclusion of the academic in the FET curriculum.   In this paper I explore the view that National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) are not particularly successful in promoting movement from further into higher education and training, and suggest a range of reasons why this may be the case. One of the problems is the chronic failure, in South Africa and elsewhere, to establish clarity about the identity or status of vocational and technical education. The need of the country and its people for a multitude of skills is painfully clear. But the basis of such skills has still not been satisfactorily addressed. We have perhaps underplayed the importance of general education, especially in languages, science and maths. One promising way forward could be to give attention to the development of "climbing frameworks" which would strengthen the NQF's fundamental principle of progression. But in general what I have to say points to the complexity of routes to progression, and should serve as a warning against formulaic approaches that attempt to conflate different forms and levels of learning.

Concerning "Further Education and Training"

Further education and training is a relatively new term in the education nomenclature. Traditionally, most countries have had three levels of education, namely the primary or basic, the secondary and the tertiary education levels. These levels come out of a tradition of a school system that was a predominant route to university – if not the only route. Further education terminology came out of the realisation that the system at the second level is highly skewed and positively biased toward senior secondary schooling with its general education provision. Yet a number of learners still come out of school not academically ready for university. Corrective measures for this anomaly, which had included the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), in other countries, have also produced new terminology, of which further education and training as an all embracing term for second level provision has emerged. In South Africa in particular, it can thus be said that the introduction of the term 'further education and training' cannot be separated from the introduction of a National Qualification Framework. However, in other countries the FET terminology means something different. For example, in the United Kingdom (UK) further education means post senior secondary education but pre or alternative to university. In South Africa though, it is really difficult to discuss the further education and training system outside of a national qualifications framework as the rationale for both is so closely intertwined.

In the South African context, the introduction, meaning and selective use of this new terminology has

not come about without creating some degree of confusion. For example, those who sit outside education and training can easily be misled to believe that the qualification 'Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC)' is a new qualification, which is going to be introduced to replace the senior certificate or 'matric' in a few years to come, and would not be aware that there are about seventy FETC qualifications already registered on the NQF. Why are these qualifications hidden? What is their value? How will they compare with the school FETC to be introduced in 2006? There is a big fanfare about the school FETC, and in particular the higher education sector has expressed consternation about it. Why has there been no fanfare about the rest of the FETCs which can be theoretically taken by any learner who wants to access higher education? The strangest thing out of this changing terrain is the fact that whilst it has been accepted that the senior certificate is being phased out and the FETC will now be introduced in school education, there are institutions which are now called FET colleges, but it is not clear which qualifications they will be offering. Are these institutions the same as schools?

In addition, when provision is separated from a qualifications framework, there is a clear disjuncture between the institutional type and the qualifications type. In the South African NQF, this separation is very clear, as the framework is built around the notion of qualifications outcomes, irrespective of institutional types which would deliver the curriculum. As a result, many institutions in the FET band are likely to be duplicating each other as the delineation by institution as well as the connection of institutional types and programmes is not made. According to Young (2005) NQFs are characterised by this disjuncture and this is instructive to the discussion we are about to have on the interface between FET and higher education in the context of an NQF of the type that we have attempted to create in SA.

In the first place this paper will explore the historical situation, and the problems that the country has been trying to transform in the education and training system. In the second place an attempt will be made to identify the reform attempts that have been made and the problems these have led to. Lastly, some pointers to possible solutions will be made, with regard to the FET / HE interface.

Current FET system in South Africa

South Africa found itself at the brink of a democratic government, with an extremely underperforming education and training system, despite all the equality clauses enshrined in its constitution. The FET system was also completely separated into three systems: the academic / general in schools; the technical / vocational in technical colleges; and the trade / craft in industry.

The system remains highly skewed toward the general / academic with too many students writing and passing the Senior Certificate examinations on a standard grade, and ending up with limited access options to anything meaningful. The bulk of the students who venture to the technical or further education colleges also still have their options limited to the National Technical Education (NATED) courses and a few manage to get some learnerships. NATED[2] certificates do not provide progression to higher education or work, because of the standard at which they are pegged[3]. Because NATED courses were designed to be complimented by an apprenticeship system, on their own they can hardly be seen as adequate learning in preparation for work.

Technical and vocational education has always been an important feature of industrialising countries after the Second World War. In South Africa, many of the returning soldiers were either absorbed in higher education institutions or into the very first school for technical training, established in 1940 in Pretoria, under the Director-General of War Supplies. From the beginning, it was clear that the end-product of this training was going to be qualified artisans and the apprenticeship route was the main model of training. Major parastatals like ESKOM, ISCOR, and TELKOM were given the specific mandate to be the on-the-job training sites for the apprentices whilst the technical colleges were developing throughout the country to support the classroom learning components of the artisan training.

[2] Reference is made here to the FET level or N3 courses, not anything beyond.

[3] Preliminary findings in Umalusi's study on standards of vocational education show clearly that the curricula can be generally described as being at the standard grade or less when compare to the standards of the schools.

Technical colleges offered the NATED curriculum, which is centrally managed by the Department of Education and is characterised by over-specification of instructional and assessment schemes. This overly content-driven syllabus has over the years lost its links with the industries which it purports to serve, and therefore lacks industry recognition, let alone portability across industries. The curriculum emphasises 'whole qualifications' and thus makes it difficult for learners to pick parts of qualifications according to their needs.

However, the negative aspects of the NATED curricula cannot be seen to be applicable to all instructional offerings. Umalusi is currently investigating the comparability or equivalences of NATED courses, senior certificate subjects and some NQF unit standards, in Mathematics, Physical Science, English first and second languages or Communication studies and Hospitality Studies. Preliminary findings show that some of the NATED instructional offerings and examinations are found to be at the same level as the standard grade if not slightly better, but lower than higher grade subjects in schools. It is clear from the NATED curriculum that it does tackle the issue of sequencing in learning, based on many years of experience. According to the evaluators in this study, some courses in the current NATED programmes have public credibility with employers as well as higher education institutions like Technikons. This evaluation is also illuminating other issues about curriculum design in these NATED courses. In particular, there is no one-to-one correspondence with the school curriculum. Even though there is significant overlap in curricula of schools and colleges, some aspects of the curriculum are taken by one institutional type and not the other, and more importantly there are aspects of the curricula that are of a lower level than schools as well as aspects that are almost in the Technikon terrain. This is one model of a post-secondary curriculum which would be useful to examine.

Besides the current three-track system, there are also many adults who continue to strive to improve their education attainments or the quality of the education they have acquired already. Before 1994, government night schools and linked private centres offered the only officially recognised certification in adult basic education in South Africa. This was the standard 5 adult examinations. It was widely regarded as unacceptable. Apart from its reflection of apartheid education, it emphasised authoritarian, trivial and rote learning, and was based on a schooling curriculum. With the introduction of Curriculum 2005, the old Standard 5 official examinations for adults fell away. What ABET certification there was, was then based on unguided assessments by the Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). The introduction of Curriculum 2005 for school-going learners and the growing status of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) led to a period of confusion, uncertainties, lack of direction, low motivation and poor quality in many PALCs. It was becoming clear that adults were increasingly losing ground in having access to this important currency – certificates for their qualifications.

At the end of 2001, national assessments for ABET level 4 (equivalent to Grade 9, NQF level 1 or GETC) in ten learning fields were offered by the Department of Education (DoE). The assessments were developed with the assistance of the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT), and quality assured by the Council. These assessments were the first general assessments within government adult education since the introduction of outcomes-based education (OBE) and thus attempted to build the values of OBE. They were the first comprehensive exercise in providing a basis for official certification within the education system at the new general education point of withdrawal. They also provided a first attempt for constructing qualifications according to the NQF requirements. Yet the Adult Basic Education and Training curriculum for certificates at NQF level 1 is remarkably fashioned after the Grade 9 curriculum and is proving to be cumbersome for adults. This 'school – like' curriculum clone has not only become the only problem for adult education, but the limited nature of adult education opportunities for adults at the further education and training level and also for progressing to higher education has become the real problem.

Despite perceptions, there has always been an informal link that allowed the qualifications in the different tracks to relate to each other. For example, even during the times of the highest intake in the apprenticeship system, the requirements have always been the completion of a basic education (anything between 9 and 10 years of education), to get into a technical college for theoretical knowledge.

Nowadays, FET colleges recruit predominantly from those who have at least written their senior certificate examinations. The trades/crafts have always been aligned to the theoretical provisioning in colleges. A weaker connection existed between colleges and technikons, in spite of a less centrally mediated connection.

Attempts to transform the FET system

Transformation of apartheid education and finding solutions to the problems above were and continues to be priorities for the new government. It is therefore no wonder that the NQF was one of the first Acts to be promulgated by government in 1995 (SAQA, 1995). The NQF was and is a replacement system, which did not build on the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system. Young (2005) points out that this is a common phenomenon in transforming countries, which are often driven to NQF-like reforms by political and accountability imperatives rather than any proven benefits of the new system. There was always going to be an uncomfortable tension between the new and the old, as they were not meant to speak to each other.

The NQF system was meant to address a number of issues in a system seen to be in need of a complete overhaul. Its objectives were to:

•   provide parity between general and vocational qualifications and curriculum;
•   provide portability between one site of provision to the next;
•   curb the marginalisation of vocational and occupational qualifications in most
          education systems;
•   establish progression routes to further learning, and in particular higher education;
•   promote democracy and greater equality;
•   be responsive to labour demands; and
•   provide transparency in standards that would result in improved quality in education.

The general education track has not been left untouched by the introduction of an NQF in the education system. The very first attempts to transform general education came with Curriculum 2005, and this was a huge project. Curriculum 2005 was typical of first attempts to introduce an outcomes-based education. It was characterised by no specified content, no subject boundaries, and was basically a dramatic departure from what schools could cope with. The revised version of C2005 became known as Curriculum 21st century or C21 and provided an improvement in many of the areas which were found to be problematic in C2005. Both C2005 and C21 are general education curricula and have little bearing on the question of this paper regarding the FET / HE interface, but are instructive to the question of NQFs and the FET /HE interface.

The senior certificate is the only historical qualification that has undergone transformation in the public eye, to be in line with the National Qualifications Framework. The process of undertaking this major task is worth noting here because it is a typical example of how qualifications are never just a product of a perceived need by a group of people, but also a product of galvanising and building a community of trust over a period. The establishment of the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) was a major project which mobilised a large group of people from the schools and higher education sectors. The project was undertaken over a period of slightly more than two years, and involved substantial financial resources as well. The process involved the identification of:

•   learning areas in the twelve learning fields of the NQF in which general education could fit;
•   identification of school subjects which would be taken forward into the new FETC;
•   subjects seen to have neither currency nor priority in a publicly funded education;
•   the outcomes to be achieved in each subject in the new qualification;
•   the assessment criteria and levels of desired achievements, and;
•   (in many learning areas) the content to be taught and learned.

The metamorphosis of the senior certification project came with major contestations from the higher education sector. Contestations[4] seem to be around three major areas: (a) the under-specification of content of what was actually to be taught; (b) how the proposed further education and training certificate was going to compare with the known senior certificate, namely benchmarking; and (c) the minimum entry threshold for access and successful participation in higher education. It also became clear that the introduction of new subjects such as Mathematics Literacy and African history was going to be doubly problematic due to the lack of trained teachers. The first issue played itself out in the public in the name of contestations over Mathematics Literacy as being equivalent to if not being the same as mathematics (Brombacher, 2004, Griesel, 2005). The second two issues were taken up in the several versions of the South African Universities Vice Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) proposals on the minimum admission threshold (SAUVCA, 2005). These issues are central to the issue of the interface of the FET and HE bands, and will be returned to in the next section.

Alongside general education for school-going learners, there have always been several attempts in South Africa to recognise and provide for second chance curriculum for adults who are out of the school system. One programme, worth noting because it still exists, is 'A Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults' (ASECA), developed by SACHED since 1991. This programme is particularly illustrative of the problems and issues of the FET / HE interface. ASECA is a curriculum which aims was

> to correct the historical socio-economic inequalities and injustices by providing second opportunities, and in most cases first opportunities, to secondary education, to the many millions who were denied access to a sound education (SACHED, p.4).

However, there are many lessons[5] that can be learned from the piloting of the ASECA programme by the Gauteng Youth College (GYC), which are illustrative of the difficulties in transforming an education system through an NQF philosophy, amongst other problems experienced. The GYC programme was based on a radically restructured curriculum that tried to espouse the main principles reflected in the education documents and the emerging NQF framework. It was one of the first initiatives to pilot a curriculum that was outcomes-based rather than content driven, that sought to integrate education and training and that offered learners a contact-rich based education mode of delivery. Much was expected of the GYC programme: it was seen as a priority Reconstruction and Developmental Programme (RDP) education programme for out-of-school-youth that would prepare 'failed matriculants' for employment while restoring their self esteem and confidence; it was envisaged to contribute to restoring the culture of teaching and learning in the Gauteng Province; it was intended to pilot an innovative curriculum that could be implemented on a large scale in all provinces; it was expected that links would be forged with industry and the corporate sector to ensure relevance of the education and training courses offered and to organise learnerships and placements for learners; it was hoped that the programme would offer learners an affordable second chance learning opportunity; and it was expected that the college would employ existing GDE and new graduates in teaching and administrative positions – it was a tall order.

Even though there are some successes that the GYC-ASECA programme could boast of, for a variety of reasons including timing (absence of a policy framework at the time; absence of OBE and National Curriculum Statements), preparedness of trained personnel, and a 'champion' to drive the intervention to deliver, its initial failures outweighed its gains. The failures of this programme happened in spite of the existence of a legitimate certification environment through the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT) and recognition by the Matriculation Board for ASECA as a qualification that provides access to higher education.

Lastly, vocational education is the most studied and is quite illustrative of the problems of the FET / HE interface. It is a fact that in spite of the attempts to transform the education system through an NQF, it is the vocational and occupational qualifications that have received the most attention in NQF

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[4] Separate verbal discussions held with Dr. Qhobela and Dr. Lubisi who were the chief sponsors and coordinator of this project from the Department of Education.

[5] Based on the evaluation conducted by SAIDE.

transformations. Yet these qualifications have found the least fit with higher education as opposed to the general education qualifications. The vocational education qualifications play a dual role in society, providing access to both higher education and employment. On the surface it would look perhaps that it is this duality that is the source of contention and makes the construction of qualifications indeterminate. However, this casual association may not be as simple as it looks. The importance of proper linkages of vocational education to higher education is also contested. For example Little (1997) finds the pursuit of specific vocational diplomas at the age of 16 or 17 to be highly irrational. She is of the opinion that it is much better to have the majority of learners attain upper secondary general education before they embark on specific vocational programmes.

In the South African NQF the reconfiguration of the vocational qualifications has produced a proliferation of qualifications to an unprecedented scale. At the present moment there are 70 FETCs, 490 national qualifications at NQF level 4, and 2191 unit standards at NQF level 4, registered on the NQF. These FETCs are extraordinarily diverse and many are occupationally specific, as the following examples indicate:

> FETC: Fundraising
> FETC: Dry Pet Food Advanced Processing Technology
> FETC: Debt Recovery
> FETC: Medical Claims Assessing
> FETC: Electrical Network Control
> FETC: Statutory Intelligence
> FETC: Trade Exhibitions
> FETC: Beauty (Nail Technology)
> FETC: Cigarette Filter Rod Production Technology

Most of these qualifications are new inventions and have as yet to prove their currency and demand. What is important here is to take note of the philosophy on which their knowledge base is established. First, we must ground this discussion in the theoretical discourse available to us about curriculum design and use this as a basis to analyse the emerging qualifications.

Durkheim (1961) for example argues that there are two kinds of knowledge, which he calls the 'sacred', or knowledge that is removed from the everyday world; and the 'profane' or knowledge which is directly related to real world problems. What Durkheim refers to as' the sacred'; Bernstein (2000) refers to as 'vertical discourses'; and Gamble (2004) terms 'context –independent". This kind of knowledge derives its substance from research and intellectual activities of scholars all over the world. It is knowledge that is different to everyday experience, as compared to what Gamble (2004) refers to as 'context-dependent', or Durkheim (1961) 'profane', or Bernstein (2000), 'horizontal' discourses derived from daily interactions. The former is more universal and abstract. It is developed through rigorous processes by communities of scholars. According to Bernstein this knowledge constitutes 'academic disciplines'. Young (2005) also notes that this type of knowledge is shared by both the academic and the professional disciplines, and as a result there is often a clear progression route between the school qualifications and higher education qualifications. This link is weak or missing between vocational programmes and higher education.

The traditional vocational education variant of an academic approach to knowledge was strongly based on links between vocational teachers in colleges, professional bodies and university or technikon faculties in applied fields such as engineering and business studies. The obvious and significant overlap between the content of academic subjects and vocational subjects is very obvious in the senior certificate and NATED curricula. Contrary to this overlapping and linked curriculum between the traditional vocational and general education, the standards-based approach to the vocational curriculum seems to be using what Young (2005) terms a:

…functional analysis that was developed by occupational psychologists concerned with job design, the standards-based approach began by identifying and stating curriculum outcomes in terms of what an employee would be expected to do, not what he or she needed to know. Knowledge came second and was only important in so far as it underpinned performance (p.8).

Here, Young is referring to the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) of England. He might as well have been referring to the unit standards and vocational / occupational qualifications in the South African NQF.

Unlike the senior certificate transformation process, changes in the vocational and occupational areas have been happening away from the general public but more embedded in the service providers' and consultants' worlds participating in the Standards Generation Bodies (SGBs). It is difficult to second guess what the questions were that informed the trajectory of establishing these qualifications, as these have never been made explicit, except for the broad philosophy of the outcomes-based qualification driven approach. These qualifications have not been publicly discussed beyond being gazetted where they are likely to attract the interest of the people in the sector only. Most of the qualifications are primarily driven by providers instead of coming from a genuine SGB process. It would not be surprising that their value remains limited within the sector if not particular institutions, and does not carry any currency beyond this sector, let alone provide access to higher education. If the FET / HE interface was marginal before the transformation of the vocational / occupational qualifications it can be expected that the distance is even further in the new environment.

This must be contrasted with the National Curriculum Statements, a project that consumed the energies and efforts of the education community for more than two years. Higher education bodies took specific interest in this project. The contestations, dialogue and positions advanced by higher education contributed significantly to improving what is on the table at the moment. But more than anything else, from this project we can already learn that the quality of qualifications rarely if ever can stand on its own. The process needs to be supported by an equally strong effort in building communities of trust in the education sector. This starts with the development stage and carries over to the usage period over a period of time. If an FET / HE interface is desirable, efforts would have to be made to establish appropriate structures and processes to build a community that will nurture this.

In summary, the current system still functions within separate tracks for general, vocational and / or occupationally specific education programmes. The general track has found its way of relating to the NQF, whilst attempting to build on the known subjects and high stakes examinations environment. It is early to judge if the engendered changes have gone too far or are just adequate to retain the trusted linkages with higher education. In the vocational area, there are still two kinds of qualifications, sitting side by side primarily in public institutions. The NATED programmes constitute the largest part of provision, whilst the unit standards-based qualifications and learnerships form a smaller part of provision. Most of these new qualifications did not exist before and therefore are not transforming anything known. On the other hand, if one goes by the alarming stories in the media of acute shortage of artisans in many areas, it is not being alarmist to postulate that the trades and crafts are disappearing from the education and training scene. Learnerships do not seem to have adequately replaced this form of qualifications. This happens when there is an acute need for South Africa's 'first and second economies' to build the country's infrastructure. Higher education does not seem to have bought into any other kinds of qualifications as access routes from FET, besides the school FETC.

The FET / HE interface

The South African NQF cannot boast of an astounding achievement in getting the vertical articulation questions right, in spite of the noble principles that ground its architecture. This is the question which today we have come to examine, in the quest for sustainable answers in improving the education and training system. It is argued here that in many instances the NQF discourse has some elements that militate against continuity from further education to higher education.

Creating a climbing framework

In the first place NQFs cannot easily overcome organisational or institutional cultures or ideologies. Parity between the general and other learning pathways will always be determined by higher education attitudes. In the first instance, higher education may not be interested in an integrated framework, but should be interested in a climbing framework because the former obviously tramples on their terrain. A climbing framework is often built from strong sectoral frameworks with clear indications on how progression is to be achieved. Also, there is clarity on the boundaries of qualifications and how they interlock with other qualifications horizontally and vertically. But more importantly, the steps for vertical articulation are clear (Tomlinson Report, 2004). A climbing framework will be best devised through a single system in designing rules for qualifications, curriculum, assessments and certification – this is a lesson we must learn from the successes of Scotland and failures of England, before the Tomlinson reform (Tomlinson report, 2004; Hodgson et al., 2004; Young, 2005). A climbing framework within a single system should be able to accommodate explicit differentiation, without fragmenting the system.

Building on the known

In the second place the South African NQF has been revolutionary in nature, by trying to replace an entire education system instead of being evolutionary and building on what existed. Again, the Scottish Qualifications Framework (SQA) is instructive here, whereby both the general and the vocational qualifications were first established and earned their currency before they were linked (Hodgson et al, 2004). Interrogating and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision and improving this would have provided better solutions for the problems of South African education than to replace this system with a unified system in the name of integration. The advantage of building on a known system is that it does not alienate many people as change would be evolutionary. But more importantly, an evolutionary system is more likely to accommodate curriculum changes, which are hard and are at the core of both an NQF and vertical articulation.

Qualifications and curricula

It is unwise to consider a qualification separately from the learning programme through which it can be obtained, as it currently is with the NQF. A programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that lead to a qualification. If qualifications are to connect with real learning needs they must reflect the development of standards, curricula, syllabi and assessment guidelines in respect of particular learner cohorts in appropriate learning institutions or modes of provision. The NQF is expected to facilitate a consistent, rational, pedagogically sound approach to qualifications design and curriculum planning at best. A qualifications framework must be simple enough to give structure and coherence to the provision system but not so simple that it obscures real differences in learning needs. It is the programmes or curriculum, not the statements of outcomes which will give value to qualifications, and be the basis for articulation with higher education.

Articulation of further education and training programmes with higher education is on one hand based on continuity or sameness. In other words, disciplines of knowledge that lend themselves to clear continuity in higher education provide easy continuity. For example, the dominant senior certificate is a qualification which is provided through a myriad of subjects, the majority of which are based on disciplinary knowledge found also in higher education. There is a highly regulated and prescribed menu of options, which makes it possible to organise these countless possibilities of subjects to a 'whole qualification', which can be a valued currency or a useless piece of paper depending on choices made and achievements attained. Universities have substantial power in influencing the general education track, hence more than 90% of students draw on a pool of only 10 subjects, which also find continuity in higher education. It is important to note that strong education systems have curricula which afford learners fewer options from which to choose, providing basic disciplines but with resources to make learners learn the basics well (Tomlinson, 2004). It is therefore worth noting that access to higher education is facilitated by fewer disciplinary subjects, not more, and the majority of these find continuity in higher education.

On the other hand, it is also the recognition of the different types of knowledge that has to be understood in making the interface between FET and Higher education possible. Articulation with higher education is facilitated by formal education which has the kind of knowledge that is described by Durkheim (1961) as 'sacred', or by Bernstein (2000) as the 'vertical discourse', or Gamble (2004) as 'context independent'. This is not to say that the other kind of knowledge is less important, but it is not the point of formal education. You learn it in life and on-the-job. But in particular, 'vertical', or 'sacred', or context-independent knowledge provides better access from the lower levels to higher levels than the 'horizontal', 'profane' or 'context-dependent' knowledge. One major omission of the South African NQF[6] was to treat all kinds of knowledge as potentially being vertical or sacred, or context-independent or to reject the distinction between vertical and horizontal. Any programmes which do not make this distinction and rely only on a standards-based approach as a major form of knowledge production, are de facto limiting interface opportunities as the knowledge route is blocked by trying to force together two different kinds of knowledge that do not talk to each other directly.

Quality assurance

The other element which is important in the interface dilemma is that of quality assurance applied to FET programmes. A standards-based approach is based on the assumption that the curricula or learning programmes can be developed by the providers or anybody who has knowledge of the field, and so can assessments. Quality is presumed to be located solely in the criteria or specified outcomes. On the other hand, quality in discipline-based knowledge relies on a combination of established external examinations, certification and trust within specialist communities (Young, 2005). In fact, Young is of the opinion that when other forms of assessment come into the picture, a hierarchy of preferred quality assurance approaches begins to emerge, with examinations becoming the preferred approach especially by higher education. The same observations are made by Fisher (2004) when looking at the impact of the switch made in business studies in England, from the Bachelors in Technology (BTEC) qualifications to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). He is of the opinion that this has brought about a major reversal of prior attempts for BTEC qualifications to gain wider recognition, as the bureaucratisation of quality control in the plethora of learning programme approvals and assessment-led quality control directly led to the collapse of the system, giving in to the sheer weight of impossible assessment volumes. In this country, the consternation about the 25% Continuous Assessment component in the Senior Certificate has not been put to rest, and higher education is more vocal about its disbelief of the standards when there is a component not externally controlled in the certification of this qualification. This goes to show that chosen quality assurance methods are as important in the configuration of the FET / HE interface.

Building communities of trust

Second level provision is always leveraged by powers which sit in a quadrant and must always be considered when making changes in the system. This quadrant is as follows:

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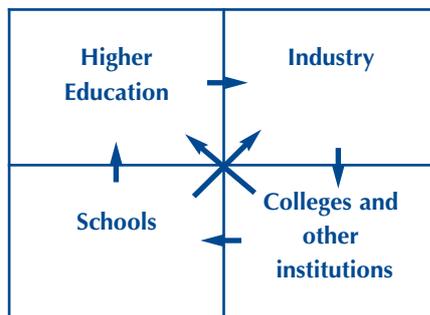
[6] Though most NQFs have adopted this approach, according to Michael Young's writings

It is no longer feasible to locate the source of power in a linear fashion as it has been historically, with schools getting their power from their association with the higher education sector and colleges with industry through the apprenticeship system. The first thing that is becoming apparent with the NQF model of NSBs and SGBs is that this complex interface within this quadrant has not been thoroughly mastered. Instead the current model has exacerbated the over supply of qualifications in an environment designed primarily to be driven by a demand side of provision, here and elsewhere where NQFs are found (Young, 2005; Hodgson et. al., 2004). To make the FET / HE interface work, a different model for driving this complex set of relationships must be found. In the first place, to make progression work, the role of curriculum experts, with insights into the sequencing of syllabus and the design of learning programmes, is crucial. To remove the role of curriculum construction from the experts' domain, is a mistake because not everyone has adequate knowledge of how curriculum works. Also, not to recognise the different roles played by each of the experts in the above quadrant will always limit progression possibilities upward. In other words, there must be internal consistencies within the further education band (general and vocational) first before articulation can be established to higher education. It is these experts, who have the respect of their peers, who are the basis of communities of trust about standards.

Building communities of trust is pivotal to any transformation of an education system. The strength and weakness of any reform will be judged not only on its outcomes related to aims, but also in the way the reform has succeeded in galvanising large groups of people to participate, debate the reform and often come to a consensus about the new system.

Institutional types in the further education band
Consideration must be given to the location, role and purpose given to the various institutions that participate in second level provision or further education and training institutions. NQF driven reforms have tended to want to blur the institutional types and institutional rungs, with the hope that this would create integration so that students might easily move from one context to another. In the first place, lessons from other countries clearly show that effective integration is derived largely from a clearer division of functions and purposes of the different institutional types (Hodgson, et al, 2004; Young, 2004, Raffe, 2003). When there is more diversity within a sector, there is bound to be more institutional competition, blurring what each institution is bringing to the table and how its programmes interface with higher education.

Higher education has become more diverse, following the international trends where now a mix of different types of institutions has emerged. The South African higher education has been clearly differentiated into three types of institutions, namely universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities. This mix varies from those institutions whose mission is to respond directly to the immediate needs of their communities and the economy, to those whose mission is rather distant, and focus on the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. FET institutions cannot afford not to differentiate and respond differently to the different higher education institutions. Because after all knowledge is the point of education, there is however a connection between the different kinds of higher education institutions as they all invariably privilege a knowledge-based curriculum, and also use knowledge as a selection mechanism (Venter, 2004). In spite of the seeming success in the Scottish NQF, it is still clear that articulation of certain programmes corresponds with specific higher education institutions. For example, qualifications with more vocational education content articulate more with ex-polytechnics than traditional universities.

With the record low absorption of matriculants in the labour market (Bhorat, 2005), progression to higher education is a high priority of those who are in the FET band, irrespective of the matric results obtained (Simkins, 2004). According to Simkins,

> …a great number of Grade 12 learners have not yet formed a realistic assessment of where they are in the world, and their schools do not help them. To them, their results in the Senior Certificate are a terrible shock and lead necessarily to major revisions in their plans (p.8).

It is clear therefore that the current FET institutions, constructed on the assumption of a linear progression from further education to higher education, may not be adequate for the needs of learners who wish to pursue higher education. Another institution seems to be implicated in addressing the question of further and higher education interface. The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) had advocated for a further education sector which would be located between schooling and higher education, called Post Secondary Education or PSE (NEPI; 1992, Cloete, 2005). The NQF intervention in South Africa, has effectively eradicated the notion of a PSE with its 'band' notion of education, where everything is meant to fit into hierarchical levels and the notion of horizontal mobility has no currency in the system. The PSE would deal with those learners who cannot access higher education directly and would provide another avenue for accessing higher education besides the dominant school to university route. At present, with the projected limited access to higher education, it seems as though there are no other access routes available to the majority of learners.

If an FETC qualification can provide access to not only higher education but also to PSE, this would inevitably increase the chances of learners to eventually get to higher education. In this context then we would be dealing with two kinds of further education and training provision – the one that horizontally links with the general education route and the one that vertically links with higher education.

Higher Education	Post Secondary Education & Vocational Further Education
General Education (Schools)	
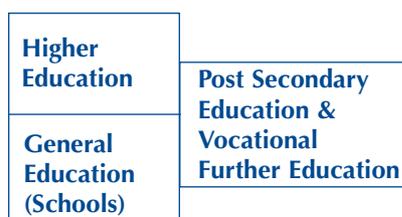
Conclusion

Any transformation of an education system is always driven by the imperatives that have propelled the changes, hence the might of the winds of change is often tested against the historical traditions from which the system is moving. In the case of South Africa a National Qualifications Framework has been a significant way of 'breaking with the past' apartheid education with its gross inequalities, which made it difficult for the blacks and working class to access higher education.

Both upper second level provisioning or further education and training and higher education provisioning have grown and diversified. At the second level we have come to see growing vocational and occupational education routes claiming more and more space as legitimate further education and training routes, and the NQFs has made a significant contribution in legitimising this. We have come to see adult learners who cannot conform to the higher education admission requirements, also claiming space from the coveted tertiary admissions. In tertiary institutions, we have seen the binary system of technikons and university being abolished and all lumped into a single higher education system, only to be differentiated again into universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities. Yet, in all these changes, the school certificate remains a dominant gateway to higher education.

As employment requirements shift up in the education system, higher education qualifications have become a 'positional good' in the whole education system, making them the most prised credentials. This is a world-wide phenomenon which is not going to be changed by the existence of a National Qualifications Framework nor will this change through declarations. We must recognise the power or upper hand that the higher education system has on the interface debate. It is something that will happen through some negotiations sometimes, but largely it is going to be in higher education's terms. In this paper an attempt was being made to clarify what higher education's terms are, as well as the process and structures that seem to make the interface work here and elsewhere.

From the experience of the school FETC, and lessons from other countries in building a viable vocational route to higher education, there seem to be three central issues that have to be taken care of in making FET / HE interface work: (i) ensuring that curriculum and quality assurance processes are of an acceptable standard to higher education; (ii) ensuring that the process of arriving at qualifications to be used to access higher education has public credibility; and (iii) accepting that progression is not always going to be linear and therefore the NQF may not be enough to work through the question of the FET / HE interface.

Also, quality is a product as much of inputs as it is of outcomes. Finally, in the South African context, we seem to be facing different issues regarding the FET / HE interface at the moment. In the general pathway or schools, the issue is about capacity to deliver the intended curriculum, whilst in the FET colleges and other providers, the problem seems to be structural, as the existing programmes do not readily talk to higher education, and their replacements seem to do so even less. Therefore, our growing fetish preoccupation with monitoring, assessments and recording, is not going to correct these problems, nor will these replace the intellectual rigour needed by higher education.

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The National Qualifications Framework, the changing Further Education and Training / Higher Education interface and the positioning of the Higher Education Sector—a response

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Introduction

In her paper Dr Peliwe Lolwana makes the strong claim that the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa "cannot boast of an astounding achievement in getting the vertical articulation questions right, in spite of the noble principles that ground its architecture". Her paper examines a range of issues in relation to the interface between the Further Education and Training (FET) and Higher Education (HE) systems of provision, and gives centrality to the question of vertical links which she claims demand examination "in order to provide sustainable answers in improving our education and training system".

In order to relate my response to the position developed by Dr Lolwana, it seems important at the outset to be clear about the reasons for higher education's interest in the interface between schooling and higher education studies; and consequently, the reasons for the sector's close engagement in the recent policy processes related to the development of a new curriculum and exit qualification for senior schooling. This is followed by comment on the nature of the problem which must be addressed if we are to ensure quality education and training opportunities for all—and hence the possibilities for portability of qualifications and progression. I conclude with brief comment on the value of the NQF and its limits.

Higher education's interests

Lolwana comments variously on higher education; for example, she talks of—

- the "consternation" of higher education about the school Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) but not about the 70-odd FETCs already registered on the NQF (p.2);
- the "contestations" of higher education regarding the metamorphosis of the senior certificate project (p.5); yet
- in terms of the new schools curriculum, higher education's significant contribution to "improving the product of what is on the table at the moment" and the "trusted linkages" built as a result (p.7);
- higher education not having "bought into any other kinds of qualifications as access routes from FET, besides the school FETC" (p.7);
- higher education "attitudes" always determining parity between the general and other learning pathways (p.8);
- higher education being "more vocal about its disbelief of standards" where assessment is not externally controlled (p.9);
- the need to recognise "the power or upper hand" of higher education in the "interface debate" (p.11); and so on.

Lolwana sweeps over various levels of analysis and neither the reasons for the dominance of higher education, nor the nature of the problem are made entirely clear and therefore perhaps warrant further scrutiny; too often higher education is negatively portrayed as the 'gatekeeper' of access (for example, with regard to entry thresholds and institutions not facilitating the entry of 'non-traditional' learners).

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[7] While drawing extensively on the work of higher education related to the FET / HE interface, the response is written in my personal capacity and should not be read as the views of the sector.

However, it is perhaps not sufficiently recognised that, in parallel to changes in the general and further education and training sectors, vast changes have swept the higher education system over the past decade. The most visible and immediate is the recent restructuring which has resulted in 23 public institutions now constituting the public higher education landscape—universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology—in contrast to the original 36 universities and technikons.

An equally substantial change—and directly relevant to the discussion of issues related to the FET / HE interface—has been the shift in institutional profiles over the past decade. A comment by the Minister of Education at the recent national consultative conference in education illustrates:[8]

> The issue of access has certainly been at the forefront of the struggle for quality higher education over the past two decades. Much has been achieved and we have been able to widen access to higher education institutions—73% of students in higher education are black; just over 50% are women; there is a strong possibility of achieving the 20% participation target that was set as our 2010 objective; and enrolments in science, engineering and technology are now 27% of the total.

In fact, the rapid increase in student enrolment has resulted in a protracted period of enrolment planning consultation with individual institutions and the related recent release to Vice-Chancellors of a planning document by the Department of Education. Again, as pointed out by the Minister, "we must accept the need for state steering or regulation of higher education to ensure greater accountability for the use of public resources towards the attainment of broad policy goals. The steering must not be strangulation of the sector but it cannot be so loose as to have no impact on national priorities" *(Ibid.)*. The issue of enrolment planning is however not yet settled and has certainly attracted major public and media attention.

It is obviously in the interest of higher education to facilitate the planned access of students to higher education studies, not only to meet the broad policy goals set out in the National Plan for Higher Education (March 2001), but to fulfil one of the core functions of higher education—to educate and graduate learners who are equipped to participate in a 21st century South African society and global world. However, it is often not recognised in public debate that higher education has a limited window of opportunity to meet this challenge and must, therefore, build on the foundation created by schooling. And it is this task that has presented particular challenges as universities have become rapidly diversified in terms of the profile of students who have gained access, and their varying levels of preparedness in meeting the demands of higher education study. Thus, in parallel to meeting the increased demand for access, higher education institutions and the sector as a whole have had to be concerned with issues related to entry level proficiencies[9] , curriculum responsiveness[10] , as well as maintaining efficiencies in terms of student retention and reasonable throughput graduation rates, across fields and levels of study.

It is in this broad context that the close engagement of higher education in the recent schools policy development processes for Grades 10-12 must be located. In sum, the sector's interests (and commitment) have remained at least two-fold:

- First, it is obvious that higher education needs to be able to rely on a sufficient throughput from schooling, as well as an appropriately prepared cohort of learners entering higher education studies each year; thus the need for sector alignment between the outcomes of schooling and the entry demands of various qualification pathways in higher education.

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[8] National Consultative Conference on Education, 30-31 May & 1 June 2005, ICC, Durban.

[9] Thus the reason for the sector's national benchmark tests project which aims to establish entry level benchmarks for academic and quantitative literacy, and proficiency in Mathematics; 2005-2008 will constitute the pilot phase of this system-level project.

[10] SAUVCA recently completed a curriculum project that set out to examine the different dimensions entailed in "responsiveness", cf. Curriculum Responsiveness—case studies in higher education (2004).

- Secondly, and related, it is critical that higher education build on the foundation established by schooling, given the limited window of opportunity it has to develop the kinds of graduates demanded by a 21st century world.

Both conditions - i.e. producing sufficient numbers and appropriately schooled graduates - demand the ongoing involvement of the best expertise within the higher education sector. It is thus not a matter of "consternation" or "contestation". The efforts of higher education in attempting to shape policy outcomes, as well as in maintaining an ongoing relationship with the department with regard to the resolution of policy and implementation concerns, are undertaken within a context of a sector committed to addressing educational challenges which are not entirely of its own making.

Of course, the focus on schooling has not precluded higher education's commitment to providing access to so-called 'non-traditional' learners; i.e. both those who require 'second chance' opportunities of entry and progression as they cannot be admitted on the strength of prior school-leaving results, and those who may have had to follow workplace development trajectories outside formal further and higher education systems. However, such actions are indeed less visible, smaller in scale, and largely handled at an individual institutional as opposed to systems level. And perhaps the reasons are obvious: neither adult education and training, nor the FET college system, have progressed to a stage of public educational debate on the nature and indeed outcomes of new proposed curricula, assessment frameworks, exit standards and the alignments required between systems. As Lolwana points out, public debate - and indeed system linkages - are necessary in order to elicit the cooperation and engagement of those outside the entrusted circle of actors, which she suggests, are at present embedded in the worlds of service providers and consultants (p.7).

The nature of the problem

If we are to provide sustainable answers to the question of vertical links that Lolwana places central to the FET / HE interface problematic, where do we start in understanding the nature of the problem? Given the absence of a clear specification of the problem to be addressed, it is difficult to know how to conceive of that which will fix it. We are told that the situation is one where:

- The idea of a (differentiated?) FET system was the result of the realisation that corrective measures were needed to address an education system skewed in favour of senior secondary schooling.

- The term "further education and training" cannot be treated as separated from the introduction of the NQF, seen as central to addressing a number of issues in a system that required "a complete overhaul" (p.4).

- Vocational and occupational qualifications having received the most attention within the NQF, yet having "found the least fit" with higher education; and that a proliferation of level 4 qualifications and unit standards have been registered, yet their "currency and demand" have yet to be proven (p.6).

In explaining the weak or missing link between vocational programmes and higher education, Lolwana draws on the analytic categories developed by Durkheim (sacred and profane knowledge), Bernstein (vertical and horizontal discourses), and in the local vocational education context, Gamble (context-dependent and context-independent knowledge).

However, the link between these categories and the problem of the lack of fit between vocational and academic trajectories is not sufficiently clarified, nor the ways in which such categories constitute or exemplify "the theoretical discourse available to us about curriculum design." (p.6).

This is followed by the author's reference to Young's (2005) analysis of the National Vocational Qualifications in England, and her suggestion that he might as well be referring to the unit standards and vocational / occupational qualifications in the South African NQF. Young writes in reference to the standards-based approach to vocational /occupational curriculum design, that it "began by identifying and stating curriculum outcomes in terms of what an employee would be expected to do, not what he or she needed to know. Knowledge came second …"(p.7).

There thus seems a two-fold problem hidden in the reference both to analytic categories and to the ways in which a standards-based approach to curriculum design tends to put knowledge in the background. In the first instance, Lolwana seems to suggest that there are different kinds of knowledge that respectively characterise higher education study and vocational education. Secondly, she seems to suggest that a standards-based (and outcomes-based?) approach to curriculum design too often results in little attention being paid to the nature of knowledge that the curriculum should impart.

This theme is however not carried through in the way in which she contrasts the curriculum project focused on developing National Curriculum Statements for Grades 10-12. Instead, she applauds the process that resulted in the building of strong "communities of trust" (p.7).

Indeed, it seems accurate to say that NQF processes to curriculum design too often result in the ritual of specifying curriculum outcomes and assessment standards, a process that seems to replace the need for analytic categories that will make explicit both the content and form that must structure educational interventions, or the knowledge, skills and competencies that must be developed. As already mentioned, Lolwana refers to the "metamorphosis of the senior certificate project" which came with "major contestations" from the higher education sector, one being about the under-specification of the content which must be taught (p.5). This however misses the point made by higher education in relation to the draft national curriculum statements. In summary, we argued that curriculum developers needed to return to core concepts, issues and ideas embodied in subjects—and ways of working with these— as this approach is at the heart of building a conceptual and skills foundation that will prepare learners either for higher education or, via employment, for further vocational or occupational education (SAUVCA February & June 2003). Further, we expressed concern at the lack of explicit subject-related organising principles or frameworks which guided the curriculum design of the new curriculum and the respective subject statements *(Ibid)*.

It seems appropriate briefly to return to the interface between schooling and higher education. Lolwana mentions that the current system still functions within separate tracks for general, vocational and occupational education programmes, and "remains highly skewed toward the general / academic with too many students writing and passing the Senior Certificate examinations on a standard grade, and ending up with limited access options to anything meaningful" (p.2). Of course, the new curriculum for senior schooling (Grades 10-12) has done away with standard-higher grade differentiation in the quest to provide quality and equal education for all.

This is not the place to discuss the unintended consequence of a lack of differentiation in senior schooling, but rather to point to the fact that the National Curriculum Statement, Grades 10-12 (General) caters, in addition to the academic trajectory and in parallel to the FET colleges, also for learners who need to (or choose to) pursue vocational and occupational pathways. The new schools curriculum thus needs to balance two fundamental aims: to prepare school leavers for life and work, and to provide a platform for entry into higher education.

In the protracted period of higher education developing a set of propositions on minimum entry requirements for higher education studies, care was taken to specify from the list of offerings which subjects are regarded as 'gateway' subjects that ought to develop a knowledge foundation for, in particular, degree study. The draft policy is now published with a much expanded list of 'designated subjects' for degree study, and the sector is in the process of finalising its response and recommendations.

The fact is that there is mounting evidence of a widening gap between the conceptual foundation and skills base developed by schooling, and the entry demands of higher education study (see, for example, Yeld 2003).

Given the vast disparities in schooling provision which are likely to remain a reality over the short- to medium-term, it is clear that vertical articulation between formal schooling and higher education is also not straightforward. The challenges have to be addressed by both schools and higher education: for the schools sector, the challenge relates to the implementation of a new curriculum that does not merely propound a curriculum "equally accessible to all" but makes this an implementable reality. For higher education the challenge rests with having to balance the dual demands of equity / redress and development. In order to achieve this balance, institutions need carefully to design curricula that are 21st century appropriate, as well as implement strategic projects to increase and broaden access, particularly of intellectually talented students who have not had adequate preparatory opportunities (see Griesel and Pokpas, 2003).

The value and limits of the NQF

It is perhaps accurate to say that public higher education (and universities, in particular) have not been entirely comfortable partners in the implementation of the NQF[11]; in fact, it may at this point also be accurate to say that the NQF may have had limited impact on curriculum change and the nature of qualifications within higher education.

Lolwana comments that the NQF "was and is a replacement system" (p.4) and draws on the analysis of Young (2005) who points out that NQF reforms are invariably driven by political and accountability imperatives, rather than any proven benefits of the new system. As Spurrett (2004: 163) suggests in a different context, "There is no shortage of general propaganda for this or that … or other approach to education, but much of it seems to be produced in relative, or considerable, isolation from the main lines of active research."

As outlined in the paper, the objectives of the NQF are to

- provide parity between general and vocational qualifications;
- provide portability between different sites of provision;
- curb marginalisation of vocational and occupational qualifications;
- establish progression routes in particular to higher education;
- be responsive to labour market demands;
- provide transparency in standards; and
- promote democracy and greater equality (p.4).

These are indeed noble ideals in a society and educational context where vast tracks of practices, systems and structures still have to be changed. More importantly perhaps is to ask whether an NQF can provide an appropriate approach to education.

To illustrate with some examples:

To provide parity between general and vocational qualifications
Can a framework indeed achieve this? And is it useful to claim that parity will always be determined by higher education "attitudes", or that a climbing framework will be more appealing to higher education than an integrated framework because the latter "tramples" on the terrain of higher education? (p.8).

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[11] For a view of the sector's concerns related to the NQF processes of standards generation and setting, as well as the bureaucratisation of these processes, see the response of SAUVCA to the Review of the NQF implementation (August 2002); and the sector's subsequent response to the Consultative Document of the Departments of Education and Labour (November 2003).

This kind of value judgement regarding the achievement of parity cannot be 'fixed'; it is equivalent to valuing the services of medical doctors more than philosophers—it *ought* not to be but it is, as Lolwana recognises when she writes that "higher education qualifications have become a 'positional good' in the whole education system, making them the most prised credentials" (p.11).

To provide portability and progression routes
This is indeed extremely important in a global, 'media-ised' world and not merely a bureaucratic matter, but one where the kind of knowledge, skills and competencies to be transferred can be matched.[12] This moreover demands a much finer analysis than the very old and perhaps inappropriate distinction between sacred and profane. Context-dependent knowledge (oral, particular, local, timely) is the character of pre-modern thought and ways of life; in opposition to this, high modernity privileged the written, universal, general, and timeless—or context-independent knowledge[13]. It has become fashionable in some quarters after postmodern thinking to revalue pre-modern ways of thought. Whether this is at all useful in equipping those entering global markets of skills exchange is not at all clear.

Lolwana suggests that "Interrogating and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current provision and improving this would have provided better solutions for the problems of South African education than to replace this system with a unified system in the name of integration" (p.8). She further comments that while the NQF "is expected to facilitate a consistent, rational, pedagogically sound approach to qualifications design and curriculum planning it is the programmes or curriculum, not the statements of outcomes, which will give value to qualifications, and be the basis for articulation with higher education" (p.8)

Indeed, the crux of quality education rests with the 'what' and 'how' of teaching and learning – and it is the outcomes of these processes that provide access, portability and progression.

Concluding comment

In the third and final section of her paper, Lolwana elaborates on some pointers to possible solutions regarding the problems related to the FET / HE interface. While I have already alluded to some, the following are important to note, in conclusion:

*   She argues for a different model where internal consistencies within further education (general and vocational) are stabilised first before articulation can be established with higher education.

*   She argues for a differentiated FET sector, as well as for recognition that a linear progression from further to higher education may not always be appropriate.

*   She further argues for the building of communities of trust / practice (see Young, 2003) in order to galvanise the support of large groups of people.

*   And she concludes with an observation that different interface challenges have to be confronted in the general schools pathway where the issue is about *capacity* to deliver the "intended curriculum", while for the FET colleges and FET vocational / occupational providers the problem seems to be *structural*.

I hope I have done Lolwana's sweeping analysis of the vast terrain of further education justice. As said earlier, higher education's interest and commitment rest in the recognition that resolutions are required to educational problems which are not entirely of its own making.

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[12] Thus the keen interest of higher education in the degree of match between the outcomes of schooling and the entry expectations of higher education qualifications.

[13] See Toulman, 1990.

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National Qualifications Frameworks as integrated qualifications frameworks

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Introduction

At the heart of current debates on national qualifications frameworks lies a paradox. On the one hand, many countries, including South Africa, introduce such frameworks in order to transform aspects of their education and training system, their society, or their economy. On the other hand, the literature on qualifications frameworks suggests that they are most successful when they are modest in ambition and incremental in approach: when they build upon existing structures and practices and on the trust, the mutual understandings and the power relationships that are embedded within them. In other words, it would seem, the frameworks that are judged to be most successful are those which succeed in transforming very little.

The solution to this paradox may lie in the meaning of a 'successful' qualifications framework. To address the problems of integrated frameworks, therefore, we need greater clarity about their purposes. Integration is not an end in itself; it is a means to other ends. In this paper I start by discussing what we mean by an integrated qualifications framework. I then identify possible purposes of an integrated framework and briefly discuss whether qualifications frameworks achieve these purposes by commenting on the Scottish experience. I then review three kinds of barriers to integration, which I label epistemological, political and institutional. I conclude with a few suggestions on how these barriers might be overcome, in the hope that these might stimulate reflection and discussion on the current position in South Africa.[14]

I draw on the experience of qualifications reforms in Scotland, in the other countries of the United Kingdom and in other, mainly English-speaking, countries. I also draw on cross-national research by colleagues and myself on what we have called the 'unification' of post-compulsory education and training systems. This term describes a range of policy initiatives, not always involving qualifications frameworks, by which countries try to bring academic and general education closer to vocational education and training. Integrated qualifications frameworks can be understood as part of this wider process of unification.

What is an integrated qualifications framework?

A problem in discussing integrated frameworks is that the concepts we need to use - such as integration, education and training - are all highly contested. I therefore start by asking two questions: what do we mean by an integrated qualifications framework? And what are the different forms of knowledge that we are trying to integrate?

There is an extensive literature on the concept and meaning of a national qualifications framework (Donn and Davies, 2003, Young, 2003, 2005, OECD, 2004); here I focus on what it means for a framework to be integrated. An integrated qualifications framework is more than just a comprehensive one. A comprehensive framework, as distinct from a partial framework, includes all types of learning: academic and vocational, formal and informal, education and training. Being comprehensive is a necessary condition of an integrated framework, but it is not a sufficient condition.

A comprehensive framework could be a mere list, or a loose coupling of distinct sub-frameworks with 'just an occasional look over the fence dividing the two' (Isaacs and Nkomo, 2003:80).

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[14] I am grateful to John Hart, Jeff Mukora and Michael Young for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Responsibility for the opinions expressed and for errors of fact and interpretation is, of course, my own

An integrated framework is one that not only includes different types of learning, but also changes the relationships between them. And when we ask how it should change these relationships we find two contrasting perspectives on the concept of integration.

The first perspective stresses *uniformity*. An integrated framework, in this perspective, is one that fits all learning and all qualifications into a single mould. It imposes stringent common design rules for the structure of qualifications, for the way their content is specified, for assessment and certification, for quality assurance, and so on. In other words, it is a *tight* framework. One of the most common distinctions in the literature on qualifications frameworks is between those that are tight and loose, strong and weak, stringent and less stringent. Until recently this literature tended to assume that an integrated framework and a strong framework were the same thing. It is probably true that a very loose framework - with no common design rules, or with only very weak ones - is unlikely to be integrative; but this does not mean that we should define integration in terms of tightness. For one thing, the literature is full of warnings about the difficulties of implementing tight frameworks and making them work: if we define integration in terms of tightness we may condemn ourselves to fail. But more importantly, tightness refers merely to the characteristics of a qualifications framework, whereas the definition of an integrated qualifications framework should refer to the purposes - the vision of integration - that such a framework is expected to serve.

In more recent policy debates integration has been associated, not with uniformity, but with *diversity*. An integrated qualifications framework is one that recognises and celebrates a wide range of purposes, epistemologies, modes and contexts of learning, but which also recognises the need to build these into a coherent and coordinated system. In order to do this, it has to impose some aspects of uniformity. Some design rules have to be tight, in order to promote coherence; other design rules should be loose, in order to encourage diversity. The trick, of course, is deciding which should be tight and which should be loose. This is the tension, which Young (2005) has described, between the *principle of difference* and the *principle of equivalence*. To manage this tension effectively we need to be clear about the purposes of integration.

Understanding the diversity of learning

This leads to my second question: what are the forms of learning or knowledge which we want to integrate within our diverse but co-ordinated system, and how do they differ?

In South Africa, integration is usually understood in terms of linking or unifying *education* and *training*, although other terms including *discipline-based* and *work-based* (or *practice-based*) are used. In much of continental Europe the debate uses the terms *general* and *vocational*; in many English-speaking countries the former is subdivided into *academic* and *general* and latter into *professional* and *vocational*. These terms all have different connotations, but they do not affect my general argument, and I will refer simply to education and training or to academic and vocational. How do these types of learning differ?

One view sees education and training respectively as representing distinct knowledge structures, distinct modes of learning and distinct social relations. They are incommensurable, and they cannot sensibly be combined within a single framework. This view has been expressed forcibly by critics of integrated frameworks in New Zealand and South Africa (Smithers, 1997, Ensor, 2003). An opposing viewpoint, represented by Pring (2004) in England, challenges the 'false dualism' between the academic and vocational or between education and training. The terms education and training describe distinct purposes of learning, but as practices they are not mutually exclusive. The Study Team in South Africa expressed a similar view when it argued that education and training were points on a 'continuum of learning' (DoE and DoL, 2002): education and training are different, but the differences are of degree and they can shade into one another. A similar perspective underlies the Consultative Document's proposal for three interconnected pathways (DoE and DoL, 2003).

A third view sees education and training primarily as social constructs which reflect institutional, political or status divisions within the system. They sometimes correspond to different forms of knowledge or different purposes or modes of learning, but at other times they do not; the connections are variable. An integrated qualifications framework will include types of learning which vary along a number of distinct dimensions: they vary with respect to their purpose, epistemology, mode of learning, institutional context, and so on. And when we use terms such as education and training, or academic and vocational, we may be invoking any or all of these differences, or possibly none of them.

This third view may seem like an elaboration of the second, but it has distinct implications. Instead of a single continuum of learning it identifies several continua, weakly correlated with each other. Integration therefore raises a range of different issues - epistemological, political and institutional - which will be important in different circumstances and different contexts. It may be misleading to wrap all these issues up into a single dichotomy - or even a single continuum - between education and training. I return to this point later, when discussing barriers to integration.

Another implication is that nearly all qualifications systems or frameworks, however partial in scope, face problems of integration, because they all straddle differences of one kind or another in the content, mode or organisation of learning. They all incorporate assumptions about equivalence and commensurability which are based on a compromise between technical and conceptual purity, on the one hand, and what is practical and affordable on the other. Comprehensive national qualifications frameworks which aim for integration face the same problems, but to a greater degree.

The purposes of integration

Integrated qualifications frameworks need to be understood in relation to a cross-national trend, which colleagues and I have termed the 'unification' of academic and vocational learning. We have studied this trend in a range of (mainly Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]) countries, and especially as it affects upper-secondary education and training (Lasonen and Young, 1998, Spours *et al.*, 2000, Lasonen and Manning, 2001). This trend is the result of three broad pressures (Raffe, 2003a).

The first is *economic*. Many countries unify academic and vocational learning as part of their response to the economic challenges of globalisation. Changes in work practices are perceived to require new types of skills and knowledge and new modes of learning which transcend the traditional distinctions between academic and vocational, for example by emphasising the integration of theory and practice or demanding 'connectivity' rather than specialist occupational skills. The development of flexible labour markets calls for education and training systems that can respond flexibly to changing needs, unimpeded by the rigidities associated with academic/vocational divisions.

The second pressure is *democratic*. In South Africa the case for integration is dominated by the history of apartheid and the issue of redress; but there are democratic forces at work in other countries as well. For example, in both Sweden and Scotland there has been public support for unified upper-secondary systems which are perceived to extend the egalitarian principles of comprehensive education; and in many countries more unified systems are seen as a way to include learners who are disaffected, disadvantaged or at risk of social or economic exclusion. Democratic pressures encourage the pursuit of 'parity of esteem' between different learning pathways, the replacement of socially selective tracks by more flexible pathways, the extension of opportunities for access and progression, and the recognition of skills possessed by people who previously had no access to formal qualifications.

Much of the discussion about unification - and about qualifications frameworks - has focused on the tensions between these economic and democratic aspects (Allais, 2003, Strathdee, 2003). However, when colleagues and I studied 'unifying' trends across Europe, and across the home countries of the United Kingdom, we identified a third pressure which was at least as important as these two. This can best be described as *systemic*. The unification of academic and vocational learning is a response to the

increased scale and complexity of education and training systems, to the wider range of economic and social purposes that they are expected to serve, and to systemic problems such as credentialism and academic drift. In the past different sectors of education and training could be managed separately because their organisation and purposes were relatively simple and distinct. Now, they are interdependent parts of a larger and more complex system which requires stronger measures of coordination and coherence. Systemic pressures thus encourage systems of governance, regulation, funding and quality assurance that embrace all sectors of education and training, measures to enhance the standing of vocational training relative to academic education, and arrangements for articulating different types of learning and supporting progression and transfer between them.

Many countries are pursuing some measure of unification, although they do not all use qualifications frameworks to do so. Their strategies vary in the relative importance of economic, democratic and systemic imperatives. They vary in the strength of the model of unification: our earlier research identified a continuum of 'tracked', 'linked and 'unified' systems (Spours *et al.*, 2000). And they vary in the extent to which qualifications systems and qualifications frameworks are used as instruments for change.

An integrated qualifications framework may therefore be used to promote different purposes, corresponding to distinct concepts or models of integration (Raffe, 2003a). These include:

- *curricular*: to encourage learners to combine different types of learning (eg applied and theoretical), to develop integrated forms of learning and knowledge, to promote transferable and generic skills, or to promote parity of esteem;
- *longitudinal*: to make pathways more flexible, to facilitate portability and transfer, to provide seamless opportunities for access and progression in lifelong learning, to promote recognition of informal and non-formal learning; and
- *organisational*: to promote more coherent and better co-ordinated arrangements for the delivery, staffing, quality assurance, governance and funding of learning.

Do qualifications frameworks achieve these purposes?

It is difficult to generalise about the extent to which qualifications frameworks achieve these purposes. This is partly because frameworks vary widely in design and purpose (and some do not aim for integration at all), and partly because the experience of most qualifications frameworks is still very recent. There is a limited research base on which to judge whether and how qualifications frameworks achieve the various purposes of integration.

So let me comment briefly on a single case study: Scotland. The Higher Still reform introduced a 'unified curriculum and assessment system' of post-16 education starting in 1999; we have studied its progress and we recently summarised our conclusions (Raffe, Howieson and Tinklin, 2005). In varying degrees Higher Still aimed to achieve all three sets of purposes: curricular, longitudinal and organisational. It has updated the curriculum but its impact on curricular integration has been limited. The chief executive of the Scottish Qualifications Authority recently commented that it had done little to promote parity of esteem. Nevertheless, the curricular aims of Higher Still were opposed by some teachers, especially English teachers who felt that their subject's role in developing critical awareness and understanding was being replaced by a 'training' model which emphasised communicative competence. The biggest source of dispute was the Higher Still assessment model, a hybrid of the old academic and vocational models, based on the principle that all programmes should include a combination of internal and external assessment. The practical difficulties in implementing this principle led to a national crisis in 2000 (Raffe, Howieson and Tinklin, 2002). It met resistance from both sides of the academic / vocational divide, and it was tacitly subverted by the ('vocational') Further Education colleges which exploited the new system's flexibility by offering programmes based on units (assessed internally) without grouping these into courses (assessed externally). With respect to longitudinal integration, Higher Still has had a substantial and positive impact on opportunities for access

but there are still many issues to be resolved before it provides a seamless progression framework. It has encouraged collaboration between schools and colleges (an aspect of organisational integration) and, together with other reforms, it has helped to create a more flexible and manageable education and training system. However, the new qualifications introduced by Higher Still were implemented more slowly than expected in vocational areas, partly because their design features were considered unsuitable and partly because some of them were considered too 'academic'. The new framework never covered as wide a range of vocational education and training as was at one time envisaged.

This task has been left to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (2003). The SCQF, formally launched in 2001, is a looser but comprehensive framework, of which the qualifications introduced by Higher Still are in effect a sub-framework. We are currently evaluating its early experience. I cannot tell you our conclusions, but some issues are already in the public domain (Raffe, 2003b). Of the three purposes of integration, the SCQF is primarily concerned with longitudinal integration and organisational integration. It has been successful in developing an agreed model which covers all areas of education from higher education to informal and non-formal learning. It provides a tool to support curriculum change, institutional collaboration, credit transfer and the recognition of learning; educators claim to find this tool useful. However the SCQF cannot force any one to use this tool, and there are tensions over the extent to which the framework alone can force change. So far its direct effect on (for example) credit transfer has been small. There is some frustration with the slow pace of progress. And this is in a country which is regarded as one of the 'success stories' of qualifications frameworks (Tuck, Hart and Keevy, 2004, Young, 2005)! The balance sheet for many other qualifications frameworks is, at best, similarly mixed and tentative. Of course, most national qualifications frameworks are at a very early stage and the literature stresses the long time it takes for them to develop and to become fully implemented.

The Scottish experience illustrates two features which are shared by other integrated qualifications frameworks. First, the integration of academic and vocational learning, or of education and training, tends to be the most contentious aspect of the design and implementation of these frameworks. Issues arising from integration have been associated with very public conflicts and with resistance to the reforms. Second, all frameworks experience a tension between two characteristics of qualifications frameworks described earlier: scope (comprehensive versus partial) and tightness. This is illustrated by Figure 1. Many integrated qualifications frameworks are designed as frameworks of type D. They tend to move in the direction either of B (by becoming less comprehensive) or C (by becoming looser), or a combination of both. This was true of Higher Still; it has been true of the national qualifications frameworks in South Africa and New Zealand (Philips, 2003); it has also been true of many frameworks which started as partial frameworks, such as the National Vocational Qualifications framework in the UK, which became looser and more partial as it developed (Raggatt and Williams, 1999).

Figure 1. A simple typology of National Qualifications Framework

Tightness Scope:	Loose	Tight
Partial	A	B
Comprehensive	C	D

What are the barriers to integration?

The barriers to integration are of three broad types.

The first is *epistemological*. In several countries, most notably New Zealand, higher education and 'academic' schools have resisted the incorporation of their qualifications into a framework designed, as they see it, to fit the epistemological assumptions of industrial training (Smithers, 1997, Mikuta, 2002). Education and training, in their view, represent different structures of knowledge and different modes of learning: they can neither be classified into a single set of levels, nor fitted into a single curriculum and assessment model. Their epistemological arguments have typically focused on:

- the unit-based nature of integrated frameworks (in conflict with the holistic character of educational knowledge);
- the specification of knowledge in terms of 'outcomes' (in conflict with the open-ended nature of educational learning);
- the model of assessment (atomistic and competence-based); and
- the use of common level descriptors (either inapplicable to both education and training, or too general to be meaningful).

Integrated frameworks have also been resisted, for parallel reasons, by vocational interests. In many countries, such as England and France, there have been concerns that a common qualifications system could undermine the integrity of vocational learning.

The epistemological issues are real and important. However, many of the epistemological barriers described above may have more to do with the particular design of the qualifications framework than with integration per se. The Scottish experience shows that a unitised and (loosely) outcomes-based model can accommodate academic learning. Conversely, when the UK introduced a very tight model for National Vocational Qualifications there was fierce opposition from within vocational education and training. The problem was the model, not integration. The argument is further confused by being polarised in terms of education and training - or rather, in terms of caricatures of education and training. I have already argued that the differences among types of learning are multi-dimensional, and that epistemological issues arise within education and within training. In Scotland, for example, we are debating whether the levels of the SCQF, developed mainly for post-16 education, can be used in relation to the school curriculum where the structure of levels must reflect the processes of cognitive development in childhood. All systems of qualifications cover an epistemological range and make compromises in the process. We have become used to the idea that schools, or universities, should use common systems of assessment and awards for subjects with very different knowledge structures; it is only when we apply the same approach in less familiar contexts that we become aware of the assumptions and the compromises that are involved. The experience of numerous qualifications reforms reminds us that technical perfection is unattainable, and that the quest for technical perfection can be damaging.

The second barrier is (in the broad sense) *political*. National qualifications frameworks attempt 'revolutionary change' (Young, 2005:13). They may be seen either to sustain established economic and social interests and power structures, or to challenge them. They are variously used to extend government control of education and training, to reduce the autonomy of educational providers, to increase the influence of employers and to promote social justice and equal opportunity (*ibid*.; OECD, 2004). It is hardly surprising that they may meet political resistance. Political barriers are harder to overcome if the different interests of education and training are represented by different departments of government or different regulatory systems. They are also aggravated to the extent that institutions, staff and learners come to define themselves in terms of academic or vocational missions, and therefore feel that their identities are threatened by integration.

Above all, they are aggravated by the nature of qualifications, and especially academic qualifications, as a positional good. A positional good is one whose value declines as other people have more and more of it. In a credentialist society qualifications are a positional good, and a reform which aims to raise the status of vocational qualifications (and increase their value) threatens to undermine the positional value of academic qualifications. It therefore threatens the institutions which deliver academic qualifications and the social groups which most often achieve them. This may explain why, even though integrated frameworks have at times been resisted by both academic and vocational interests, the academic interests have been more powerful. And it may explain why in England the government recently rejected proposals for a unified framework of general and vocational diplomas for 14-19 education. Instead it has proposed a separate vocational track while affirming that General Certificates for Secondary Education (GCSEs) and A levels (the main academic qualifications) will remain the 'cornerstones of the new system' (UK DfES, 2005:6).

The third barrier is *institutional*. Political and institutional barriers are closely linked and the distinction between them is a fine one. But whereas political barriers are more or less consciously erected by those who oppose particular aspects of integration, institutional barriers arise as unintended consequences of the way that institutions work, and of the operation of social structures such as the labour market. In our analyses of qualifications reforms in Scotland we have distinguished the 'intrinsic logic' of the qualifications system from the 'institutional logic' in which it is embedded (Croxford *et al.*, 1991, Raffe *et al.*, 1994). The intrinsic logic encourages flexible pathways, portability and parity of esteem, but the institutional logic may perpetuate existing divisions and barriers. For example, we found that some colleges were reluctant to recognise credits earned at school because it made their timetabling more complicated or because funding arrangements discouraged it. And the institutional logic of work-based learning is very different from that of college-based vocational education, as it depends on the availability and willingness of employers to recruit, promote and train people. An employer does not have the same incentive as a college to provide a progression route through vocational learning. This is true even in countries, such as the Netherlands and Norway, which have tried to integrate school-based and college-based vocational learning.

Different institutional logics may be a direct consequence of the separation of education and training at government level, if this results in different funding and regulatory regimes and in different opportunities and incentives for learners and providers. Inadequate resources, nationally or locally, can be a further barrier to integration.

How can an integrated qualifications framework overcome these barriers?

How can an integrated qualifications framework overcome these barriers? This, of course, is for the Colloquium to discuss. I will conclude with a number of suggestions, and a few comments on the South African situation as perceived by an (ill-informed) outsider.

Clarify the meaning of an integrated framework. When I was asked to introduce this session on integrated frameworks my first step was to find out what people meant by integration in the South African context. This was not easy. I soon came to agree with Heyns and Needham (2005:30) that 'there does not seem to be a common understanding of what is meant when we talk about "an integrated framework"'. The same is probably true of any other country. An important condition for progress is to try to reach this common understanding.

Clarify the objectives of integration. In order to do this, however, it is necessary to reach agreement about the objectives of integration, and the priorities among these objectives. And by objectives I do not refer to the features of the framework, but the broader goals to which it should contribute. Is the main objective to develop new forms of knowledge, to promote access and progression, to promote social justice and redress, to make the system more manageable, or what?

Make sure that the objectives are achievable. All national qualifications frameworks tend either to have exaggerated ambitions, or to be the subject of unrealistic expectations. For example, many European countries expect qualifications frameworks, or other 'unifying' measures, to promote a concept of 'parity of esteem' that could never be achieved without totally changing the way in which their labour markets worked, let alone their education systems. The South African National Qualifications Framework is more ambitious than most frameworks, particularly with respect to integration (Granville, 2004). As Jansen (2004:88) has commented, it 'promised what it could never deliver in practice'.

Clarify the barriers to integration. I have the impression that in South Africa, as in other countries, there is a tendency for barriers that are really political or institutional to be represented as epistemological. This may be reinforced if the debates are conducted by technical specialists whose frame of reference emphasises the technical and epistemological aspects. To identify the barriers as (say) more political than epistemological does not in itself make them easier to overcome, but clarifying the barriers is the first step in developing a strategy for change. A possible starting point is to identify the institutional barriers, some of which might be at least *relatively* easy to surmount.

Make the framework as loose as possible, consistent with its (achievable) objectives. An integrated framework is not the same as a tight one, although a framework needs to have some design rules in order to introduce coherence. As I have suggested above, the challenge is to decide which features should remain tight, and which features should not. For example, in Scotland the Higher Still reform emphasised a common assessment regime as a principle of integration, for cultural and pedagogical reasons; but when this regime was tacitly relaxed, I do not think that this severely undermined the objectives of integration. I do not know which aspects of the South African National Qualifications Framework, if any, should be relaxed (perhaps the Colloquium will accept this challenge), except to say that this will depend on the objectives of integration. It will also depend on which barriers are judged most important, as my next suggestion illustrates.

Exploit the integrative possibilities of unitisation. South Africa is now committed to a unit-based framework (DoE and DoL, 2003), but it seems to be following a top-down approach which starts with whole qualifications. An alternative approach would start with a national bank of units. These could be of different sizes and types (discipline-based, work-based, etc) with different design rules for each type.   Most qualifications would comprise more than one type of unit, and the same units could be used for different qualifications and for qualifications in different 'pathways'. This approach would promote the curricular and longitudinal objectives of integration, and it would address the main epistemological issues. However it would still face institutional and political barriers. It would require a more centralised approach to the development and regulation of units because units would no longer 'belong' to particular pathways or sectors (except perhaps for programme-specific units of synthesis). It could also be seen to challenge the autonomy of universities and occupational interests. However a compromise between this approach and a top-down approach might be achievable.

Progress in stages. The literature on National Qualifications Frameworks emphasises the long time required for their development and implementation. They need to be based on communities of trust and organic relationships which can only be built up over time (Granville, 2003, OECD, 2004, Young, 2005). The frameworks which are considered to be most successful have developed incrementally, but there are different ways in which this can happen. One way is to start with sub-frameworks: for example, the SCQF is effectively a confederation of sub-frameworks (including the one introduced by Higher Still) whose development can be traced back at least to 1983. Another way is to expand the functions of a framework in stages. The SCQF may again be an example. Its main impact so far has been internal to institutions, for example as a tool for curriculum re-structuring; external functions such as credit transfer may follow. Either way, it is important to be aware of the longer-term goals of the framework as well as its short-term objectives. If an integrated framework can only be achieved by first creating sub-frameworks, we must ensure that these sub-frameworks do not merely preserve the separation of their respective types of learning.

Coordinate with other policies. A further impression of the South African National Qualifications Framework is that it is not only more ambitious than other frameworks, it is also less supported by complementary policy measures. Such measures - termed 'policy breadth' in some of the literature - would take some of the strain off the National Qualifications Framework. Especially if the main barriers - or the barriers that are most easily removed - are perceived to be institutional, then institutional reform, staff training and development, funding and regulation structures, measures to influence the processes of educational and occupational recruitment, may all help to promote the objectives of integration. And if the NQF is no longer the sole policy instrument for integration, it may be easier to make it a looser framework without compromising the objectives of integration.

Concluding comment

I return to my initial paradox: how can a qualifications framework be transformative if it has to be embedded in current practices and understandings? There is no simple answer, but my paper has pointed to two rather different types of challenges, and we must meet both of them to have a chance of success. The first is technical: to design the framework in the way which best meets the objectives of integration. This means devising appropriate design rules, finding the best balance of tightness and looseness, drawing up appropriate level descriptors, determining the role of sub-frameworks, deciding on the status of units compared with whole qualifications, and so on. The second challenge is more difficult. It is to define the goals of integration and relate these to wider economic, social and political transformations; to identify and overcome the barriers to progress; to plan the evolution of the qualifications framework, and of the wider education and training system, over a sequence of stages; and to manage and steer this evolution. In other words, the second and harder challenge is to envision, motivate and manage change.

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**National Qualifications Frameworks as Credit Accumulation
and Transfer systems**

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Abstract

The paper explores the link between Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) systems and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and raises a number of issues associated with credit. The paper draws on examples from systems around the world, but concentrates on the lessons to be learned from the development of NQFs and CAT systems in Scotland - which has a long history of NQF and CAT systems. It also takes in current work in the European Union (EU) on the European Credit Transfer System for higher education (ECTS), the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) and the proposed European Qualifications Framework.

The paper starts by considering the growth in National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), similarities and differences between NQFs around the world, and some important distinctions between Frameworks. The nature of NQFs and the reasons they are attractive are considered and the case is made that they are not as simple or straightforward as they appear. The aim of this section is to establish some concepts and terminology which will be useful to a consideration of CAT systems.

The paper then considers the reasons given for developing CAT systems and the intrinsic conditions for CAT developments. It draws a distinction between credit accumulation systems and credit transfer systems. In this context it looks at zones of trust.

The rest of the paper is taken up with more technical aspects of CAT systems: units of credit, notional learning time, credit and workplace competence, credit levels, the credit-rating process, general and specific credit and credit and programme design. It finishes with some of the issues which surround unitisation and whether unitised and credit-rated systems are more responsive to user needs. This section finishes with a consideration of credit and quality assurance.

The paper closes with a brief conclusion and offers some topics for discussion.

Introduction

National Qualifications Frameworks
A growing number of countries around the world are developing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) to address economic, social and political issues. It is claimed that NQFs can open up access to learning, make qualifications more responsive to economic and technological (and sometimes social) change, make it easier to supply the right skills at the right levels for the country's economic (and sometimes social) needs; and improve both learner progression and labour mobility.

NQFs are conceptual structures which show how qualifications - however the term is defined - relate to each other within a set of levels. In addition they may distinguish between types or categories of qualifications, and may use these distinctions to highlight common features of qualifications and clarify relationships between them. Some frameworks also allocate credit to qualifications, in which case the qualifications can be easily compared in size or volume. These may or may not be set up to allow credit to be accumulated within qualifications or transferred between qualifications.

With or without credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) systems, NQFs appear to offer a simple mechanism which will make the education and assessment system more comprehensible, accessible and responsive. They also seem to offer a simple way of making the agencies responsible for education and training – particularly those dependent on public funding – more accountable, and of making change and the management of change easier. This makes NQFs appealing to governments and to the agencies which support social and economic reform – notably the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the European Union. However, this appealing simplicity may be more apparent than real.

Firstly, in adopting NQFs, authorities are accepting the value put on these frameworks by the countries which have already adopted them, although it is not clear yet whether all of the claims can be substantiated.

Secondly, while NQFs tend to share much in the way of aims and conceptual underpinning, those which have been and are being developed vary considerably in their scope and implementation, making comparisons difficult.

Thirdly, it is becoming clear that, to be effective, NQFs need to be supported by a range of other measures (what David Raffe has called "policy breadth" – Raffe, 2003).

The first of these points is only a caveat in this paper, but the second and, to some extent, third points are central to it.

Variations in NQFs
As indicated above, the NQFs which have been developed or are emerging share basic structural features. However, different countries approach them in different ways, creating significant variations between frameworks. For example:

- they all have levels (sometimes called "credit levels"), but the number of levels varies - from 8 in the original South Africa framework to 12 in Scotland
- they all have level descriptors, but the structure and content of these will vary – from two or three lines in England to multi-dimensional specifications in New Zealand

In most cases it is agreed that the framework is primarily concerned with the outcomes of learning, but how that term is defined will also vary:

- a framework may only contain full qualifications – as in England to date - or it may also contain other forms of accredited learning – as in Scotland
- the qualifications in the framework are usually unitised, or modularised, but not always – South Africa combines these
- if there are units, they may be designed to have value in their own right, or they may simply represent a convenient division of a larger programme, with no stand-alone value – Scotland combines these

To avoid confusion in this profusion of approaches, some terms and definitions need to be established at this point:

First, it is worth distinguishing between modules and units. In this paper, and fairly generally, units are understood to be assessed, quality assured and certificated (small qualifications of a kind), while modules are understood to be small learning programmes, sub-divisions of larger programmes created for convenience in delivery– and possibly useful in managing credit transfer. Modules may not be subject to quality-assured assessment and, while they may be listed in transcripts, they are not certificated like qualifications.

Second, in spite of the use of the term "qualification" in the title "NQF", there is a need for a wider term to represent the qualifications, units, other kinds of award, and sometimes also the modules, which may directly or indirectly populate a framework or be used as a basis for credit accumulation and/or transfer. In this paper the word "programme" and the phrase "programme of learning" are used for this purpose.

Thirdly, and most importantly, existing frameworks vary considerably in scope and focus and for the purposes of this paper it is worth noting four ways of differentiating:

- comprehensive and partial frameworks
- tight and loose frameworks
- frameworks and meta-frameworks
- qualifications frameworks and credit frameworks (the latter usually being designated *qualifications and credit frameworks*)

Comprehensive and partial frameworks

In some countries, including South Africa and Scotland, the NQF is (or aims to be) fully comprehensive, taking in academic, general, vocational and workplace learning [15] at all levels from basic literacy and numeracy through to post-graduate degrees and top professional qualifications. In others the scope of the NQF is restricted in some way – usually to particular provider sectors. This may means that the NQF only covers either university education or vocational education and training, or it can mean that there are co-existing, but separate, NQFs for these sectors as in England and New Zealand. The more restricted the scope of the framework the easier it should be to create credit links, but the wider scope and the more diverse the contents of the framework, the greater the need there may be to establish a CAT system as a means of strengthening, and meeting the aims of, the NQF.

Tight and loose frameworks

There is also an important difference between frameworks which are primarily intended to support regulation and those which are primarily intended to enable stakeholders to work more closely together, for example to achieve greater relevance to user needs in designing programmes or to create more integrated pathways across or between provider sectors. This difference has been expressed in a number of ways, one of which refers to "tight" and "loose" frameworks (Young, 2003). In this typology, a tight framework is one with a high level of prescription about qualification design, quality assurance and other key features, while a loose framework is based on general principles which acknowledge that there are different types of learning and seek to accommodate these differences within an overall structure. The link between tightness and looseness and the success of CAT systems has not been established, but in this paper it will be argued that it is likely that successful CAT systems will be tightly defined, but relatively loosely managed.

Frameworks and meta-frameworks

A number of regional qualification frameworks are emerging around the world – notably in Southern Africa and in Europe, but also in the Caribbean. These are being developed for the same reasons as NQFs, but the developers are having to find ways of bringing together a range of systems and frameworks, some of which are already well established and mature. To do this they will need to be loose frameworks as described above, and will need to accommodate quite radical differences among the frameworks they are bringing together, such as different numbers of levels. Because of this, these new frameworks may be described as meta-frameworks. In Europe the bulk of the work on the proposed European Qualifications Framework is going into the creation of a structure of "reference levels", but there

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[15] In the UK, the term *academic* is increasingly being replaced by *general* in other than university settings – academic outcomes will relate to the knowledge associated with a specific subject or discipline; *general* outcomes will be more concerned with what are seen as transferable cognitive and practical skills. *Vocational* (sometimes *pre-vocational*) outcomes are distinguished from *occupational* outcomes in the Scottish system. Occupational outcomes are designed with full occupational competence in mind and may be achieved by employees in the workplace. *Vocational* outcomes will be based on standards of occupational competence, but are likely to have more emphasis on underpinning knowledge and more learning in off-the-job or simulated conditions.

is also work on credit taking place behind this – on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a Higher education system which has been in place since 1989 and is now being extended as part of the Bologna Process, and on the European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which was initiated in 2002 as part of the Copenhagen Process.

<u>Qualifications frameworks and credit frameworks</u>
Finally, whilst most frameworks use at least a form of credit-rating, some frameworks are, or have been, primarily concerned with qualifications and may not be designed to facilitate the use of credit, for example the English frameworks to date. Of those which do have credit systems, not all are full CAT systems, since some are more focused on credit accumulation and others on credit transfer. The South African system seems to be mainly concerned with accumulation at present, while, as its title suggests, ECTS is designed for transfer. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is designed to be a full CAT system.

Putting a credit value on a programme of learning allows stakeholders to describe and compare the volume of learning undertaken in completing the programme and this is useful in itself. This paper assumes that the accumulation of credit takes place within sub-systems, for example within the programmes offered by one organisation or in one sector within an NQF, and that transfer operates between programmes, but more importantly between organisations or sectors.   In a CAT system, these two processes are integrated, so that the credit which is accumulated within one sub-system may first have been transferred from another sub-system. (All of these ideas are explored further in later sections of this paper.)

This may be illustrated from the history of the Scottish system:
In Scotland in the 1980s, the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) ran a fully unitised system in which the units were the only qualifications available at most levels. The units were designed to a standard size (with half units and double units, etc) and this gave them a credit value. They could be built into programmes of different sizes, but these programmes were not qualifications. These multi-unit programmes were extremely valuable and were used to achieve many of the aims associated with frameworks – opening up access, improving provider responsiveness, supplying local and national skills needs, and so on.[16] However it was not until the 1990s that a fully-functioning credit system emerged. Firstly, the introduction of larger qualifications (group awards called General Scottish Vocational Qualifications – GSVQs) meant that there was real credit accumulation since unit credits could be collected towards this cumulative qualification. GSVQs also created a measure of credit transfer since learners could start working towards one GSVQ (eg in IT) and then switch to another (eg in Administration) and carry at least some of their previously achieved units into the new qualification, and the rules also allowed some credit to be given for previously gained workplace qualifications. However, this was all within the SCOTVEC system. The real breakthrough into credit transfer came with the development of SCOTCAT, which allowed learners to carry credit from college-based Higher National qualifications into university degree programmes. All of these were significant milestones on the road to the SCQF.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer systems

Reasons for developing CAT systems
The stated aims of credit systems do not appear to be markedly different from the aims of qualifications frameworks. They usually combine social, economic and political aims such as reducing inequity in the system, increasing lifelong learning, improving the country's skills base and making the system more accountable. What they have in common is a vision of a system of programmes which are outcomes-based and usually unitised or modular in nature; where there are no restrictions (or, at least, fewer restrictions) on the place, pace and mode of learning; and where there is widespread recognition of previous learning.

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[16] The route described here – from units to CAT – is probably the most common, although it may be more accelerated than was the case in Scotland. However, it is not the only route. In Northern Ireland (through the NICATS project) and now in the Republic of Ireland the trajectory was the opposite one, with the rules of the credit system being agreed first, followed by the unitisation process.

The idea of recognition of previous, or *prior*, learning – which might be considered a pre-requisite of credit accumulation and, even more, of credit transfer – needs some analysis. The phrase, "giving credit for learning" is often used simply to mean giving recognition for entry into a programme and the learning referred to may be formal and certificated or experiential and not formally assessed. This paper is not concerned with recognition for entry. It is concerned with mechanisms which allow previous learning to count towards new learning in some way, and that will normally mean that the learning has been formally assessed and may have been certificated.

CAT systems depend on the assumption that it is possible – and, it may be implied, relatively simple – to identify the outcomes of a programme of learning, to place these outcomes at a level, and to give them a weighting or numerical value which makes sense in terms of another programme. At its least developed, this will involve two institutions or departments within an institution being able to agree a localised set of terms and reference points to deal with interchange between two programmes so that the outcomes from programme A can be recognised in the context of programme B. This may have to be repeated each time recognition is sought and there need be no overarching (or underpinning) values to ensure that programme A can also be recognised on the same basis in relation to programme C, even if programme C is run by the same organisation or institution as programme B. The kind of system which is the subject of this paper, would create the conditions for wider and more consistent practice.

A well developed CAT system will ensure that the general terms in which the framework is described are comprehensible to all framework stakeholders – and that the details of the framework are clear to all those we might call the credit agents, i.e. those bodies which will seek and give recognition for the outcomes of learning. It will have a common set of levels, with descriptors, so that all outcomes can be allocated to a level and these descriptors will be couched in outcome terms. And it will have an agreed basis for the allocation of credit to the outcomes of learning.

These might be thought of as the intrinsic conditions for the recognition of learning. They do not guarantee that all learning will be fully recognised in all circumstances.

Zones of trust
Some of the issues affecting recognition of learning have been detailed by Coles and Oates (2004) in developing the concept of a zone of mutual trust – sometimes called zones of confidence. These zones are agreements which allow specified areas and levels of learning from one institution or sector to be automatically accepted and credited by another institution or sector and the existence of an agreed credit system can make negotiations on such zones easier.[17] At its simplest a zone of trust may exist between two institutions, working in partnership to allow students to transfer in one discipline; at its most complex, a zone might extend across a network and cover a range of programmes, disciplines and levels. In Scotland, for example, there are zones of both kinds in relation to credit transfer from Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas undertaken in further education colleges into university degree programmes and vice versa.

In a fully-developed NQF, with an ideal, fully-functioning, CAT system, the zone of trust would cover all the outcomes in the framework and extend to all participants in the system. This suggests a number of considerations and conditions which would affect the creation of such an all-encompassing zone of trust. These would relate to:

a)   agreements on general credit value
b)   comparison of outcomes
c)   security about the quality of the learning

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[17] The situation in Australia may also be worth noting here. While the Australian Qualifications Framework has guidelines for credit transfer, effectively there is no single system of currency and a number of commentators have commented on the lack of consistency and transparency in the practice of universities giving credit for prior vocational learning. The Victorian Qualifications Authority has set out to create a "Credit Matrix" on the lines of the SCQF which will apply a single credit currency for all qualifications which will improve

Establishing a credit unit – national learning time

Credit is intended to give an indication of the volume of learning required by a programme. It is usually expressed as a numerical value linked to notional learning time, although the precise definition of notional learning time may vary from system to system. Many credit systems (including the South African) work on the basis that one credit point represents the outcomes of learning achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning.

In most systems, notional learning time will include all learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes, including, for example:

• formal learning (classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials, etc)
• informal learning (community groups, community-based workshops, etc)
• practical work and practice to gain and refine skills and knowledge (in the workplace, laboratories, workshops, etc; necessary private study, including information retrieval, preparation, revision, etc)
• all forms of assessment

This interpretation might be more restricted in partial frameworks, for example if a framework did not include, and therefore did not have to take account of, informal or workplace learning.

The need to undertake any or all of the activities subsumed under notional learning time will be considered when credit is being allocated to a programme. However, the mix of learning activities will vary from programme to programme and sector to sector. For example, learning might be based mainly, or solely, on:

• formal instruction
• self-directed study
• open, flexible or online materials
• practicing skills under supervision in controlled or uncontrolled conditions
• reflecting and reporting on practice

In Scotland, Notional Learning Time for credit is linked to a notional 1,200-hour learning year, so that any programme which is likely to take a full-time learner a year to complete is worth 120 points. The originators of the SCQF would be keen to point out, however, that this is a rule of thumb, rather than a precise measurement. Other, subsidiary, rules of thumb operate in different parts of the framework – for example, in the upper half of the framework the assumption is made that for every hour of learning directly related to formal instruction, one further hour of learning will be required, while in the lower half of the framework a further half hour will be required. Thus a unit requiring 40 hours of programmed (classroom, laboratory, workshop) time at level 9 in the SCQF would usually be given a credit value of 8, while a similar unit at level 4 would usually be given a credit value of 6. These practices apply to academic, general or vocational programmes, but similar forms of practice in credit-rating are being developed for programmes based on workplace competence.

It is important to remember that none of this relates to the time taken by any individual learner and that the credit value of a programme cannot be increased or decreased if a learner takes more or less time to achieve the outcomes. This is particularly important in the context of workplace learning.

Credit and workplace competence

Concern about notional learning time is often expressed by workplace trainers in the UK because they fear a return to time-serving for the acquisition of qualifications. They maintain that competence should not be measured in this way and sometimes argue that credit is inappropriate in the context of workplace qualifications since there is no substitute for competence and there can be no credit transfer into a competence-based qualification. On the first point it seems unlikely that most employers and managers will take such a view of competence. They have to consider the resource implications

associated with skills development just as much as any funding body or college manager, and would surely value a standard measure to help with this. The second point needs further discussion and testing out. However, these concerns underline the point that credit-rating must be undertaken by, or closely involve, those who are familiar with the programmes being credit-rated - in this case those who understand the competences concerned and what is involved in acquiring them. Undoubtedly there will be complexities arising from the diverse nature of workplace learning and problems of separating out work which contributes to skills development from that which doesn't, but in Scotland – supported by organisations from the other UK jurisdictions – work has already been initiated to find ways of dealing with these issues and developing appropriate formulae to allow credit values to be attached to workplace learning which will allow employers, qualification designers and (most importantly) learners to benefit from this learning being part of the overall credit system.

Establishing credit levels

Levels and level descriptors might be thought of as primarily framework, rather than CAT, issues. However, level descriptors are so important to the process of credit rating that something needs to be said about them here.

First, Level Descriptors are points of reference, practical aids in the comparison of outcomes of learning (and programmes of learning). They provide indicative information on the complexity, creativity, sophistication and depth of learning which has to be demonstrated at a level, but they are not designed or intended to be used like a tariff or a calculus.

Because of this, there are different views about the form these descriptors should take. Some argue that, to be useful, descriptors should be very detailed; others that because the detail in the descriptors will never be exhaustive, it is probably better to keep descriptors brief.

There is a practical middle ground, which seems likely to be the way taken by the European Framework. This is posited on the idea that the descriptors will have to be used for a variety of purposes and should therefore take more than one form:

- First, given the fact that, if the framework is well used, then most of the users will not be technical experts, there is a need for a set of simple descriptors which characterise the frameworks in a way which makes sense to the lay user – learner, employer, political stakeholder.
- Second there is a need for more detailed generic descriptors which will allow comparisons to be made between sectors/disciplines.
- And thirdly there needs to be scope for sectoral interpretations/extensions of these to be developed.

The logical order for development is from general to specific, but it could be the other way round. In any case it needs to be an iterative process.[18]

It is worth noting that in the guidance on allocating programmes to levels in the SCQF, users are encouraged to be as pragmatic as possible and discouraged from using the level descriptors, which are quite detailed, as the first and only point of reference. They are invited to use programmes which have previously been levelled as benchmarks. These may be programmes which cover similar ground to the programme being levelled, or they may be commonly used for entry to the programme under consideration, or commonly used as the next stage of learning. Other possible approaches such as eliminating the levels above and below the assumed level of the programme under consideration (a technique which originated in South Africa) are also recommended. These approaches reinforce the

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[18] Although the descriptors need to be stated in outcome terms, it is arguable that there is also a place for other factors to be used as commonly understood (but neither necessary nor sufficient) indicators of level. These would take the form of typical characteristics of the context in which the outcomes are likely to be achieved and would be similar to the type of characteristic currently used by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) frameworks.

status of the descriptors as tools – more like colour charts to be used in a complex process of comparison than metre sticks which can simply be laid alongside the object to be measured.

The credit-rating process

The issue here is how to agree the learning time required to complete a programme of outcomes. In some cases, where the programme is well established, it will be possible to do this by reference to experience; in others it will be done by making comparisons with well-established and previously credit-rated programmes; but in some cases the process will have to be carried out from scratch. In this case the following need to be taken into account:

- when the programme/qualification was designed what was it intended for – what type of learner, with what kind of previous knowledge and experience and with a view to what kind of practice or progression?[19]
- in the light of this, what effective content of learning was envisaged (eg what would the target learners be likely to know/be able to do already; what would be partly known; what would be new and require a lot of instruction/practice)?
- what kind of learning activities would be required, including the assessment itself (eg attending formal teaching / training, supervised and unsupervised practice work, private study and revision, remediation, being counselled or mentored, reflection)?

Allocating credit to different kinds of outcome will require different kinds of calculation depending on the kind of learning activity involved *where this is reflected in the outcomes*. Examples might be: the balance of instruction to personal research required in studying a subject in a college or at a university or the balance between knowledge and skills acquisition in a vocational course in a college or in the workplace. In all other respects, credit should be independent of the place, pace and mode of learning.

Like most of the processes in an NQF, credit-rating is essentially a practical matter and as such needs to take full account of existing structures and expertise. It would be easy to develop tightly governed, possibly centralised, systems to ensure the quality of this facet of the system, but this approach is likely to be contentious and to create a bottle neck. The principles governing credit-rating must be tightly defined in the ways described in this paper, but the process itself should probably be as loose as is consistent with assurance of reasonable consistency. This is probably best achieved by the early establishment of benchmark programmes / qualifications and other comparators and the use of peer and expert groups or panels to carry out the work.

General and specific credit

Another important concept in CAT systems is the distinction between general and specific credit. The credit value given to a programme on the basis of notional learning time is its general credit value and when the programme is used as a component in a larger programme this is the value which it must be given. It might be thought of as the credit accumulation value.

However, when previously acquired learning (programme A) is being taken account of for credit transfer into a new programme (programme B), a comparison will have to be made between that learning and the requirements of the new programme. Sometimes this process is described in terms of establishing "equivalence" between programmes, but more often what it sought is a less complete comparability than is implied by the word "equivalence".

When two programmes are compared in terms of learning outcomes, there are three possible findings.

- The outcomes are identical

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[19] In this process, credit is defined with reference to a typical or target learner – ie the learner whom the programme designers had in mind. Some systems refer to an average learner, but this seems too abstract a term to be useful in the context.

- The outcomes are comparable – and in this case they may be:
  - o comparable enough to allow the full credit value of programme A to be counted in programme B
  - o sufficiently comparable to make programme A worth some credit in programme B

The smaller amount of credit, given in the context of programme B, is specific credit. This might be thought of as the credit transfer value.

The judgement made will be dependent on the design of programme B. For example two qualifications in catering might contain the same unit on nutrition (unit A), but in one qualification it is a core unit and in the other an option. A learner who wished to transfer into one of these qualifications might be seeking credit for a different unit on nutrition (unit B). The two units are at the same level and have the same credit value. On comparison, unit B might be judged to cover 60% of the outcomes of unit A. Nonetheless it might be judged fully equivalent to unit A in the qualification where unit A is an option, but not fully equivalent in the qualification where unit A is core. In the first case unit B would receive its full general credit value; in the second it would receive a smaller amount (60%?) of its value as specific credit.

The allocation of specific credit may also be related to the currency of the outcomes on which the general credit value is based and the importance, or otherwise, of currency in the receiving programme.

A full CAT system must make sure that the processes by which these comparisons and judgements are made are fair and transparent. This may include instituting appeal procedures and this is a point which some institutions and sectors will find difficult in spite of the advantages of systematisation.

In some cases, it will be possible to recognise uncertificated prior learning by matching it to the outcomes of existing qualifications.

Credit and programme design
The range of contexts in which prior learning can have a credit value for transfer can be extended by pre-planning and programme design - i.e. level and credit value can be used as a basis for designing programmes with built-in scope for credit transfer. Bringing about programme design which increases the potential for learner mobility through credit transfer is usually a key objective of a CAT system. Although this paper is primarily concerned with credit, it should be noted that programme design can also improve the potential for the recognition of different kinds of prior learning for entry, exemption, assessment on demand and accelerated learning.

There is an important distinction in the design of the programme between required or "exit" outcomes and more preparatory or supplementary outcomes. "Exit" outcomes describe skills and knowledge without which the learner could not be considered qualified; preparatory outcomes are there to ensure that the learner has knowledge and skills required to achieve the required outcomes – by definition these are likely to be taken in the early stages of the programme; and supplementary outcomes are useful, but not necessary – these often take the form of options.

The main ways in which programme design can take account of prior learning are through the recognition of areas where the learning is broadly preparatory, through flexible option arrangements and by leaving space for the block transfer of credit. Preparatory learning is usually found in programmes which are designed to accommodate progressive learning over a long period of time and to take learners from a low entry base to a high exit base (like degree programmes). It may be, for example, that certain components are designed to give a broad understanding of certain principles, or a broad introduction to a certain body of knowledge or to allow the development of certain skills. In these cases it maybe possible to accept as comparable a set of outcomes which do not precisely match the outcomes of the component which will be replaced by the credit transfer. The same principle may apply to options, but

here the comparability may be even less exact. Considered carefully, it may be seen that the option represents only a requirement for learning in a particular field at such and such a level and with a minimum credit value of X.

Blocks of credit can be made available in programme design for those who have a sufficient set of suitable outcomes through another programme to by-pass the preparatory outcomes and progress directly to the exit outcomes. These blocks of credit may also replace some of the credit normally acquired from options in the programme. In the Scottish system, for example, it is possible to gain a block of credit of this kind towards an HND for (say) a year of degree studies. This would be useful to a student who had completed a first year at a university, but decided not to continue and wanted to move to a vocational course at a college. Another example comes from Scottish Group Awards (pre-vocational programmes with a notional learning time of one year), which also have core and option structures.   Here a block of credit is available in place of options for anyone who has completed a workplace qualification in a related area at an appropriate level.

Credit and unitisation
This paper has taken the view that the full use of credit requires that qualifications and other programmes be divided into credit-worthy components – units or modules. In some sectors, modules may be more acceptable than units if they are seen as less of a threat to the integrity or unity of the whole programme and it should be possible for a framework to accommodate this perception.

There may also be an issue in different sectors about the size of programmes. Some sectors may have views on the minimum size that a module or unit can be, others on what constitutes the largest practical size. Frameworks should be able to accommodate this kind of diversity. For example, it would be possible to have rules for the smallest and largest units/modules acceptable within the whole framework, while accepting that some sectors might set their own maxima and minima within these overall figures. The kind of compromises which should be possible include the following:

* the smallest programme would be a single-credit unit / module, but there would be no requirement on any sector to develop single-credit units / modules
* it would be in order for any sector to say that units / modules of more than or (more likely) less than X credits are not suitable for practical or pedagogical or whatever reasons
* in order to ensure that credit transfer could occur there would be a principle that normally units / modules shouldn't be bigger than X, where X is the size of units / modules learners are likely to be bringing forward
* for the purpose of recognising prior learning of all kinds, sectors would have to establish mechanisms to allow exemptions where credit transfer was not possible or appropriate

Credit and responsiveness
At the beginning of the paper it was suggested that one set of objectives for a credit system related to responsiveness to the economic needs and the labour market. It is usually assumed that, in a modular system, it should be possible to make more and quicker alterations to programmes as required by technological and other changes. The conception is that the component parts of qualifications, like parts of machinery, can be removed and replaced relatively easily. This has proved true to some extent, but even unitised systems (in the UK at least) may find it hard to keep up with the pace of technological change in some economic sectors. Also, in the case of workplace competence the analogy of the machine part may prove to be a false analogy. Workplace programmes may be more like sophisticated electronic devices where it is cheaper or more effective to scrap the whole than to replace the part. Where there is an increase in responsiveness, it is more the result of unitisation than the introduction of credit, but again this is an area where a fully-developed credit system can make the system easier to understand and evaluate.

Credit and quality assurance

As indicated earlier in the paper, extrinsic factors such as where, over how long, or in what form, learning took place should not play a part in the credit-rating process as it relates to programmes in the framework. For a programme of learning to find a place in the framework it should have to meet quality criteria relating to learning and assessment, and the bodies which provide that programme should also be required to meet quality criteria in the same areas of delivery. These requirements and the accreditation process should be sufficiently rigorous, open, transparent and effective to ensure that everybody participating in the framework can assume that the quality of the outcomes, when achieved by any learner in the system, will be credit-worthy.

This is an example of the kind of policy breadth which is required for a framework to be effective.

Conclusion

Issues in developing and implementing a CAT system within the South African NQF

SAQA already has a basis for the development of a full CAT system. If it wishes to develop this experience suggests that the approach should be flexible and incremental and would have to be backed by a range of policy, financial and practical decisions. The following areas are recommended for further discussion:

1. The aims of the CAT system - the following are proposed as areas where the CAT system could enhance the existing NQF:

   • Encouraging / enhancing work on comparability of programmes of learning with in the system
   • encouraging programme / qualification design to make learner and labour mobility easier (i.e. using level and credit value as a basis for designing more interchange able qualifications components)
   • reinforcing / enhancing the flexibility of the qualifications system and making it easier for learners to move and progress within the system by reinforcing the existing RPL system
   • making learning systems more accessible, transparent and efficient

2. The nature and uses of credit and related processes / aspects of the system should be worked on / finalised. These might include:

   • the basis for the allocation of general credit
   • guidance on both general and specific credit-rating
   • the place of zones of trust in the system and how to develop and sustain them
   • the use of credit in relation to programmes based on workplace competence
   • how credit can improve the recognition of prior learning
   • unitisation and modularisation
   • the role of credit in the design and management of programmes in the Framework
   • what learners can expect of the credit system
   • what is expected of Further Education and Training Awards Council Certificates (FETACs) and providers in the implementation of the credit system

3. Whether further work needs to be done on the architecture of the NQF to allow the framework to become a credit framework. These might include:

   • level descriptors
   • programme design (including qualification design)
   • quality assurance

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Can we build trust and enhance articulation through Credit Accumulation and Transfer? - A response

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Abstract

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been criticised for not delivering on its claims of enhancing articulation and portability. Articulation and portability between further education and higher education institutions, private and public institutions, workplace learning and public institutions seem to be areas of particular concern. The issue of portability in higher education has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Education in the Draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework document, which announces the intention to develop a national credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system.

Hart's paper provides space for the NQF community to discuss CAT systems. The paper explores the link between NQFs and CAT systems internationally. The present response outlines the salient features of Hart's paper before focusing on the idea of zones of mutual trust.

Discussing this paper provides an opportunity to debate the idea of developing communities of trust or "zones of mutual trust between institutions". This is surely needed if articulation between the different tracks will ever work. The discussion about the development of national CAT systems should afford the NQF community the opportunity to start afresh, to constructively debate and implement the lessons learnt over the last ten years of NQF implementation. These lessons should surely include:

- Start with what exists
- Work in partnership
- Listen to different communities with respect and understanding
- Work at a comfortable pace for key partners.

Hart's recommendation of an approach that is flexible and incremental and is backed by a range of policy, financial and practical decisions is strongly endorsed.

Introduction

It is a privilege to respond to the paper by John Hart at this Colloquium organised by the Research Team at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The topic is important in the context of the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The intention of the Colloquium is to develop a broad research agenda that will take the implementation of the NQF forward. It also grapples with the idea of what constitutes the role of SAQA as an apex organisation. Through the discussion of this topic SAQA takes the signal from one of its principal sponsors, the Department of Education, that it wants to research the development of a credit accumulation and transfer system as a matter of urgency with the higher education community and with SAQA. The CAT system will need to be developed and SAQA should be consulted in this process. One of the main criticisms of SAQA has been that it went beyond its mandate. The role of an apex organisation would be to initiate the process and in consultation with key partner organisations develop a road map for how we can arrive at an agreed process and policy for the particular issue at stake. SAQA in this role must be seen to be slightly removed from practice and should be seen as an honest broker. This initiative also signals that if there are no decisions taken then people will move into the gaps and take the initiative to move the system forward. This response to John Hart outlines some key features of what the CAT system could mean for the NQF and its stakeholders in building communities of trust. The paper gives a context for why the discussion of CAT systems comes at a critical time in the development of an NQF in South Africa. It provides an overview for John Hart's paper. It also provides general comment

on the practical and measurable ways of how CAT systems could work in developing communities of trust. The paper further points out some areas of weakness and concludes by suggesting that CAT system presents a good opportunity for the NQF community to start afresh in building an NQF drawing on the lessons of the past ten years.

Context

The NQF has been criticised for not delivering on its claims of enhancing articulation and portability. Articulation and portability between further education and higher education institutions, private and public institutions, workplace learning and public institutions seem to be areas of particular concern. The issue of portability in higher education has been acknowledged by the Ministry of Education in the Draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) document, which was released for public comment in July 2004. In the draft HEQF the Ministry of Education states that "the Department of Education intends to undertake systematic work on the development of a national credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system in collaboration with the higher education community and SAQA".

The context of the Hart paper is that there is a dire need to make decisions so that clear direction can be given to the education and training sector in SA. This is the tenth year of NQF implementation – if we count the year that the legislation was passed by parliament as the beginning of the process of implementation. Four of those years have seen the NQF subject to a review that is not yet finalised. While one can argue that there was contestation in the implementation of the NQF, the review of the NQF caused even bigger contestation and conflict - to the point of being primarily characterised by contestation.

General Comments

It is within this context that John Hart's paper entitled "NQFs and Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems" is important in providing space for the NQF community to discuss CAT systems. Drawing on international experience, particularly that of Scotland, Hart's paper explores the link between NQFs and CAT systems. It develops a set of concepts and terms, and then considers the reasons given for the development of CAT systems as well as the intrinsic conditions such systems need. Hart then deals with a number of technical issues before outlining a number of questions for further discussion. The questions that Hart poses will help the NQF community deal with some of the fundamental issues for a CAT system, for example:

- The aims of the CAT system
- The nature and uses of credit and related processes / aspects of the system that should be worked on or finalised.
- What further work needs to be done on the architecture of the NQF to allow the framework to become a credit framework?

This paper explores the relationship between NQFs and CAT systems and it suggests that the implementation of a CAT system is an important milestone within the development of implementing the NQF. CAT systems thus assist NQFs to reach their goals. The aims and assumptions of CAT systems are similar to those of NQFs. The vision is common to both: "a system of programmes which are outcomes-based and usually unitised or modular in nature where there are no restrictions on the place, pace and mode of learning and where there is widespread recognition of previous learning". One can argue that CAT systems enhance the function of NQFs and help them to meet their aims. Hart raises the issue that an NQF seems simple but in practice may not be the case. At the same time he points out that the claims for the effectiveness of NQFs cannot always be supported. Within this context some commentators may argue that CAT systems are yet another mechanism that should be used to prop up NQFs. This criticism can be answered partially by the point made by David Raffe that NQFs need a whole range of other policies and mechanisms to succeed. However, this is an important point that I will return to later.

Using the broad typology of NQFs, Hart makes the following points that are important for the South African NQF to take into account:

- *Comprehensive* NQFs with wider scope and diverse contents are in greater need to establish a CAT system.
- *Tight* frameworks should have a loosely managed CAT system.
- The focus has been on accumulation rather than on transfer; a CAT system integrates both credit accumulation and credit transfer.

It is also important to note that a CAT system can be seen in its simplest form as being an agreement between two departments (within an institution in a well-developed system that includes the whole framework) that is comprehensible to all the "framework stakeholders" and that the details of the framework are clear to the "credit agents". This point is particularly important to South African proponents of the NQF who have a tendency to be extremely ambitious and want to implement the most well developed system within the shortest possible timeframe. There is a need to identify exactly what it is that we want to achieve and through focus, research and resource allocation, plan how we will achieve our collective goals.

However, it seems that we do have the mechanisms in place to put a more comprehensive system in place. Hart states that to move ahead we need to have set levels with level descriptors, couched in outcomes terms, and an agreed basis for allocation of credits to the learning outcomes.

We do have set levels couched in outcomes. Presently we have an eight level framework. There is consensus that we should move towards a ten level framework. We have already agreed upon level descriptors for levels 1-4. There are draft descriptors for levels 5-8 and published draft descriptors for levels 5-10. What is needed is that there should be a formal process of declaring this to be policy, in the form of regulations, by the Ministers of Education and Labour. I want to argue that we do not need to wait for a decision on the final outcome of the NQF review to put this mechanism in place. Some people may want to change the descriptors, but this can be taken into account through built-in reviews on a regular basis.

Communities of Trust

The paper makes the point that there are intrinsic conditions for the recognition of learning that includes the idea of zones of mutual trust or zones of confidence. It seems to me that this one of the single most important issues that we will have to tackle within the South African context. Within the context of the NQF the idea has been expressed as the development of communities. All the different partners and sectors are agreed that this is indeed a need in developing communities of trust. Trust is not only an issue in the education and training arena but generally within South African society.

> The challenge to transform SA from a bureaucratic and secretive society to a responsive and transparent one is part of our *unfinished business*. Ten years after the foundations were laid in the negotiating chamber at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park this task has not been completed (Star, 18 February 2003, emphasis added)

This need to develop trust can also be seen from comments made by the major actors on the various review documents:

> The development of trust is a critical factor for the success of the system as a whole, and it can be assisted by prioritising good quality assurance practices at provider institutions; *but since trust is reciprocal and has to be earned, the fostering of trust amongst all players in the system must be a priority* (University of Witwatersrand, 2003 in SAQA's submission in response to the NQF Review report, 2002, emphasis added).

The CHE and HEQC acknowledge the need to develop 'communities of trust' but emphasise that these develop *through relationships based on common commitments, integrity and clarity of responsibilities and functions*, and are also facilitated by predictability of policies and authoritative leadership on the part of government departments and SAQA (CHE, 2003, emphasis added).

The aim of creating "new" communities of trust is supported (NBFET, 2003).

There has also been recognition that some work has already been done towards the creation of communities of trust and that we should be building on what already has been achieved.

With all its warts and deficiencies, the current NQF structure has been extensively advocated, in good faith, to a sceptical employer and consumer (of education products) market. The advocates include the professional bodies, the SETAs, providers of tuition and education as well as training providers. This effort has been hugely demanding of resources, including money, human time, energy and ingenuity. It is inconceivable that these same vital stakeholders in the industry will have to go back to these convertees and tell them it has all changed - and for no conceivably good reason that we can fathom (ICSA, 2003).

However, there is also some scepticism about the basis for wanting to create communities of trust. For example NAPTOSA in their response argue that

Communities of trust will not be created through establishment of the QCs: Two fundamental assumptions are being made. The first is that Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils will automatically result in new communities of trust. There is no evidence provided to convince NAPTOSA that this is anything more than an unfounded assumption (NAPTOSA, 2003, emphasis added).

In his paper Hart suggests that zones of mutual trust or zones of confidence have the following characteristics:

- they are agreements which allows specified areas and levels of learning from one institution or sector to be automatically accepted and credited by another institution or sector; the existence of an agreed credit system can make the negotiations on such zones easier.
- At its simplest a zone may exist between two institutions working in partnership to allow students transfer in one discipline
- At its most complex a zone might extend across a network and cover a range of programmes, disciplines and levels.
- In a fully functional NQF with an ideal functioning CAT system the zones of trust would cover all the outcomes in the framework and extend to all participants in the system.
- These would relate to:
  - o   Agreements on general credit
  - o   Comparisons of outcomes
  - o   Security about quality of the learning These characteristics must be in place if articulation between the different "tracks" is ever to work.

These characteristics must be placed if articulation between the different "tracks" is ever to work.

What is Missing?

Weaknesses in CAT Systems
Although Hart alludes to the more fundamental problems with NQFs he does not tackle the problem of how the weaknesses can be addressed. How do you address the seemingly simple assumptions of NQFs and the "claims" that they make. If the assumptions of NQFs and CAT systems are the same and

they are based on the same assumptions again what are ways in which we should address the weaknesses. The problems will not go away by introducing other mechanisms which turn out to have the same difficulties.

It is difficult to understand from the paper what are the weaknesses of the CAT system? What are some of the difficulties in conceptualisation, the implementation of the CAT system in Scotland and elsewhere or is it a success story without any difficulties?

In an unpublished paper Naude, Heyns and Keevy (2005) suggests the there may be a number of key resistances particularly from academics in higher education. Some of these are:

- The perception of academic staff that such a system will bring relatively few advantages.
- The introduction of a credit system has been viewed as an attempt to undermine the central assumption of much of the UK higher education system, namely that learning takes place within one institution, over a fixed and limited period of time, according to rules best determined by academic staff.
- The credit system is also viewed as an erosion of institutional autonomy in a system in which individual institutions remain solely responsible for all matters of credit recognition towards their awards.
- It is clear that a credit system demands a paradigm shift that requires not only changes in academic, administrative and managerial practices, but also significant shifts in professional cultures and values.

Different forms that CAT systems can take

Although Hart alludes to various international examples of CAT systems, there is too little about the forms that these can take. Concrete examples would help. Perhaps I am asking too much of the paper, but a number of different examples, especially in the developing world, would have been interesting to consider.

Opportunity to start afresh

I think we are at a watershed in NQF implementation. We started off with tinted spectacles on our journey of NQF implementation ten years ago. We had a vision, commitment and lots of energy. Some people did not have the same commitment and passion for the road that we were embarking on. We then reached a stage where a number of the key partners and stakeholders started to doubt and identified a number of challenges. Some felt ignored and developed strategies to either influence policy makers to go into a different direction, while others stopped talking to NQF die-hards. The fact that there has been no resolution to the NQF review has brought the major players back to talking to each other. The Colloquium is an opportunity for discussion, debating, listening and recommitment to the principles of the NQF. We are ten years older, perhaps a bit wiser.

I want to suggest that that the discussion about the development of national CAT systems may afford the NQF community the opportunity to start afresh, to implement the lessons learnt over the last 10 years of NQF implementation. Jonathan Jansen gave some reasons for why the NQF struggled to make impact particularly in higher education. They are:

- It promised what it could not deliver
- It was compromised from the beginning
- It lacks a credible theory of practice
- The manageable set of good ideas soon found itself engulfed and overpowered by a complex administrative apparatus so that the simple founding principles were completely lost to ordinary people.

I am sure there are many other lessons that we have learnt over the last ten years. It seems to me that some of the most important lessons in conceptualising and implementing a CAT system should:

- Start with what exists
- Work in partnership
- Listen to different communities with respect and understanding
- Work at a comfortable pace for key partners

Conclusion

I would therefore like to suggest that we need to start by doing research on what already exists in general, further and higher education, in the training arena and build on what already exist. We should also understand the institutional logic and work with this in a way that makes sense for the system as a whole.

Almost immediately we can give the process a key start if all the principles and partners agree to support SAQA in promulgating the 10 level framework and the level descriptors.

In words of Hart: "SAQA already has a basis for the development of a full CAT system. If it wishes to develop this experience … the approach should be flexible and incremental and would have to be backed by a range of policy, financial and practical decisions".

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**Only connect? Towards a National Qualifications Framework research
agenda for a new stage of atonement[20]**

Edward French

Containing the winds of change

The first NQF Colloquium provided generous space for debate. In attempting to give some coherence to the proceedings and the very diverse deliberations of twelve large breakaway sessions I have found it helpful to make use of a historical approach. This provides the background for the three broad themes:

•   *Integration* was the key subject of the second session, but opens this synopsis as it provides the overarching discourse
•   *Progression*, which was at the heart of the first session, comes next and is followed by
•   *Portability*, which could be seen as the distinctive topic of the third session

The papers which led the three sessions of the colloquium were, in this order:

•   National Qualifications Frameworks and the Further Education and Training / Higher Education interface (P Lolwana)
•   National Qualifications Frameworks as integrated qualifications frameworks (D Raffe)
•   National Qualifications Frameworks as Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems (J Hart)

These papers and the responses to them make a valuable contribution to South African NQF literature, and in some respects could be the basis for a handbook for the ongoing development of the NQF.

The present article builds on the recommendations of the discussion groups that gave focused attention to the research agenda.

The closing section offers some reflections which explain the title of this synoptic article and which are meant to point to ways in which the parts of the whole may hang together.

About the beginning and ends of integration

Many of the issues raised in the colloquium only make sense with some shared background. What follows should throw light on particular aspirations and challenges in the idea of integration, progression and portability in South Africa.

Articulation
In the earliest development of the idea of a South African NQF the controlling concept was that of articulation. *Articulation* implies flexible linkages in which qualifications and credits can be grouped in varied but meaningful associations. The quest for articulation was driven by the perception that historical education and training institutions and their curriculum were encrusted in dated assumptions and practices, locking the holders of qualifications into fixed ruts in life and work and excluding others from qualifications. An approach was needed that would create new relevance in learning and enable rapid responsiveness to economic imperatives and individual needs - especially those emerging in the context of globalisation. An articulated framework (note: *framework*, not system) was seen as allowing linkages and communication across the different pathways in provision.

These pathways were particularly seen in terms of academic, general or schooling education on the one hand, and vocational or technical training (TVET) on the other. Academic education was broadly perceived

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[20] The title is fully explained at the end of this article. In brief, it refers to the quest for integration and for renewal.

to have higher status, but limited relevance to the world of work. TVET usually had low standing in spite of the country's urgent need for skills, and was seen as cultivating trivial and rote skills for highly specific work routines, with inadequate attention cognitive development.

The poverty of apartheid education and training

The country's poor record in technical and vocational education provision was attributed in part to class attitudes typical of colonial rule, in which white-collar education was favoured. TVET had seemed most successful in the apprenticeship system, in which supervised on-the-job learning was supported by theoretical studies, usually in technical colleges. However, there were always problems with failures of linkages between theory and practice in apprenticeships. Moreover, the system had broken down for various reasons, and had been marred by racial exclusivity and linkage to job reservation for whites.

It should be noted that the problem of an education / training dichotomy detrimental to technical and economic development was strongly felt in various Commonwealth countries which were experimenting with NQFs. The notion of competence was espoused as a term that was felt to bridge the divide between knowledge and skill and, with values added, to encourage education and training to move to complex performance as a measure of achievement. This assessment ideal has posed complex challenges in reality, something reflected in Lolwana's paper, where she mentions a return to examinations after a decade of efforts to achieve this assessment ideal. The shift, was, however, contested in some discussions, where it was argued that the benefits of a move to performance assessment were only just starting to take effect.

In South Africa the political and moral dimensions of the critique of education and training were greatly emphasised. The movement for People's Education had expressed a passionate rejection of the heritage of "Bantu Education" which had been one of the most damaging institutions of a segregated order and was seen to infect all education and training provision in South Africa. An important related element in the influences at the time in South Africa was the quite strong presence of representatives of "alternative education" developed mainly by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly in the sphere of adult education. Articulation was needed to create space for the recognition and incorporation of different forms of knowledge, including indigenous knowledges, that had been marginalised in the era of Bantu Education.

Intended beneficiaries

Three groups were prominent as potential beneficiaries in the intentions of the original shapers of the NQF:

- employed workers frustrated in career paths, either because of significant gaps in their education, or because of irrational formalities that made recognition of their skills difficult;
- the many millions of the unemployed or informally employed, especially those who had been denied anything like an adequate general education, and for whom conventional schooling was out of the question; and
- the many young people going through schooling, or dropping out, who were likely to end up unemployable because an impoverished "academic" education neither prepared them for the university (to which most aspired without a hope of access) nor for making a living.

In the colloquium these beneficiaries seldom appeared on the horizon of discussions. On some three occasions in the notes from the discussion groups, attention is drawn to the needs of these groupings, only to be engulfed in technical, procedural and institutional interests. If learners come into view, it is normally the learner formerly registered in institutions or learnerships. The tendency of learnerships to be focused on high level skills rather than to cater significantly for the unemployed is mentioned twice in the colloquium notes. Consciousness of this bias was being addressed in policy, and was reflected in a number of appeals for the notion of the NQF as a social construct to be revisited.

South Africa's radical NQF
The features of the original landscape of the NQF outlined above must be borne in mind in trying to bring into focus the proceedings of the colloquium. New forms of learning and recognition of learning were being sought in a much more radical way than that adopted by related NQFs. Though very different from one another, the emerging NQFs of Scotland, Australia, New Zealand and so on all assumed a relatively respected provision of general education, and moderately working systems of articulation between levels and sectors. For them, questions of relevance, flexibility and accountability constituted the most passionate concerns.

By contrast, the South African NQF was set up to redress the effects of a hated order, and to promote new paths to recognition and access that would be real, and not merely symbolic corrective acts. The NQF was to be an instrument for human dignity and human rights. It was to encompass the whole provision of education and training, not merely post-secondary preparation for work. It was intent on revolutionising both the curriculum and the institutions of provision.

Colloquium papers and discussions refer a number of times to the ambition of the South African NQF. Most agreed that this ambition was noble but many at the same time felt that too much was expected of qualifications. Raffe especially points to the importance of a coherently supportive statutory and institutional order to share in the ambitious agenda ("policy breadth"). Others pointed to the problem of political will, and the difficulty of getting political leadership actively behind an intention that was reflected mainly in higher order abstractions and bureaucratic provisions. It was suggested that the NQF might fulfil more of its ambitions if it were streamlined and focused on fewer objectives.

From articulation to integration (but not uniformity)
An environment that was intensely critical of all education and training provision led to a dramatic, briefly contested, decision in 1993 that South Africa would not have an articulated system, but an integrated system. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and its alliance partners were the main proponents of the move, on which they took a strong line. On the whole they were supported by alternative providers. Business, which also took a leading role in promoting the NQF, resigned itself to the decision. The representatives of the Department of National Education argued for an "integrated approach" rather than an "integrated system", but this was rejected by the supporters of an "integrated system" on the belief that an "approach" would become merely cosmetic.

The envisaged integrated framework left room for differences. Indeed, the concept espoused at the time came very close to a point made by Raffe: "In more recent policy debates integration has been associated, not with uniformity, but with diversity. An integrated framework is one that recognises and celebrates a wide range of purposes, epistemologies, modes and contexts of learning, but which also recognises the need to build these into a coherent and coordinated system" (p22).

Original clarity about the purposes of integration
Raffe shows that there is considerable potential for confusion around the idea of integration and its purposes. On the whole, the founding designers and the subsequent leadership of the NQF were clear about these matters. They did not succeed, however, in communicating this clarity or fostering consensus about the value of integration among decision makers, or, as the colloquium discussions show, among a more general audience of stakeholders.

The choice of integration over articulation required that there should be a strong binding element in the framework that included but went beyond what came to be called "parity of esteem". There was meant to be reasonable equivalence in cognitive demands at comparable levels. Credible progression and portability were to be ensured by common fundamentals and theoretically significant core elements in qualifications, and a minority of elective (skill specific) elements. Various processes were proposed to ensure the appropriateness of levels and give confidence to employers or those responsible for admission higher levels of learning. These processes included:

- level descriptors, which were always seen as problematic
- exemplars, which were highly desirable but expensive to develop
- various moderation processes, notably joint moderation exercises
- the accreditation of inputs and not only the assessment of outcomes
- the quality assurance of learning achievements (e.g. of actual production and relationships in the workplace) and not only of test results

At no stage did the original designers of the NQF entertain the implausible idea, sometimes attributed to NQF thinking, that any qualification at one level should provide access to any other qualification at the next level (such as a level 4 qualification heavy in commercial subjects allowing automatic access to medicine at level 5). These questions are considered more fully under the main headings of Progression and Portability below.

Some participants in the colloquium discussions argued that credibility and comparability had been compromised in numbers of the industry-linked qualifications registered on the NQF. This was because of a sometimes palpable disregard for the more formal fundamentals and the theoretical learning demanded by the structure of qualifications (what was called the vertical or sacred learning in some of the discourses offered to the colloquium). Quality and depth could also be compromised by under-specification of content – one of Lolwana's points – or by the failure to obtain adequate agreement on level descriptors.

By contrast, one supporter of the availability of multiple qualifications argued this way: "Why should there not be a Level 4 qualification in Hairdressing without Maths or high levels of language proficiency and other theory – a qualification that gives recognition to valuable accredited skills, allows movement to even higher expertise in hairdressing, without worrying about the things that worry the universities." This observation led to a swarm of arguments about the very idea of qualifications and who owns control of the idea. Some of the arguments are picked up in the discussion of Progression below.

Another participant reminded the group that the South African NQF had been seen by some in its early stages as a fundamentally unitised or modular framework. She referred to a "shopping trolley" approach in which individuals could mix and match credits and employers or institutional gatekeepers could decide if the resulting qualification was good enough or not. She argued that the NQF's decision to go overwhelmingly for designing distinct and comprehensive qualifications had led to the proliferation of distinct and somewhat impermeable qualifications that did not support integration, progression or portability. (This point is supported in Raffe's recommendation that NQFs start with banks of units rather than whole qualifications.) In response a proponent of the present approach pointed to the need to avoid the potential of modular approaches to lead to trivial learning programmes. This was followed by an argument about whether the critique was appropriate for general education, but not for what was essentially viewed as post-school education.

Integration as a response to the loss of community and trust
In their paper in response to Raffe's presentation, Heyns and Needham show the present confusion around the meaning of integration and unpack the de facto current official dis-integration of the NQF. They imply that this is a deviation from an initial consensus about integration. In fact there was never consensus, only the silence or muted dissent on the part of public providers.

One of the most important points to be noted in terms of the discussions of the colloquium, is that the NQF was created in a context in which there was no trust between the proponents of the new order and the providers of the old order. The main reason for the decision for an integrated framework was the belief that the segregated institutions and processes of education provision in South Africa were for the most part centres of privilege or exclusion, were backward and corrupt, and were scarcely worthy of notice. A framework that encouraged articulation across sectors would not be strong enough and would leave too much to the questionable good will of sectors and institutions. In addition, education practitioners at all levels of the system were viewed as ineffectual, while long-established procedures were viewed as irrational.

Questions about how the new framework would actually work in the context of inherited systems and institutions of delivery were regarded as being inappropriate to "the political moment". The same applied to suggestions that there might be some provisions of the old order that were motivated by hard-won experience and legitimate considerations, regardless of the injustice of the order. This awareness is treated with wry ambivalence in Lolwana's paper. There was also no previsionthat the structures, many of the personnel and much of the thinking of the old order would be carried over to the new order in the face of the need to maintain capacity and working structures.

In 1992 the Department of Education and Training and the Committee of University Principals became part of the process of designing the NQF. But, initially at least, they did not represent their concerns well. If they had done so, it was unlikely that their voices would have been respected. Indeed, it became a strong point in the advocacy for the NQF to emphasise that rationally designed "national standards" were to become the arbiters of all recognition of learning, not institutions. The influence of the universities on the curriculum, on aspirations and choices, was seen as unfortunate given the development needs of the country and the learning needed by people with no prospect of going into higher education or training. Colloquium discussions showed that this perspective had not yet been laid to rest. Ironically, though, it also became apparent that higher education in certain manifestations felt frustrated by a loss of influence, which included many misgivings about the prospective Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) for schooling.

Disappointed assumptions at the founding of the NQF
In the colloquium discussions it was pointed out that the integrated NQF could be seen to have offered a new covenant on the basis of which trust might grow and cultures of quality be nurtured. For this to work it needed the backing of the full majesty of the state. It is important to remember the assumptions made about the new order in the formative years of the NQF. Firstly, there was the conviction that there would be a single Ministry and Department of Lifelong Learning after 1994. This would overcome the fierce historical division between education and training that was reflected in the territorial animosity of the former Department of Education and Training and the Department of Manpower. Secondly, it was assumed that a new Minister of Lifelong Learning would stand behind the NQF, seeing it as the cornerstone of transformation, with conviction and a clear perception of its role. Thirdly, SAQA, overseeing the NQF, would be a statutory body, supported by the state, reporting to the Ministers of Education and Labour, but independent of either of their departments. In sum, the new people's government would have the power and the political will to encourage, and if necessary, demand the compliance of providers with the principles and practices of an integrated NQF.

Instead, the legacy of two departments was maintained. (Why this happened is still obscure and subject to speculation.) At the same time, the NQF was treated as a subordinate division of the new national Department of Education, though for most of its existence it received virtually no funding from the state. Furthermore, the two Ministers of Education who presided during the unfolding of the NQF were deeply rooted in and respectful of elite academic traditions with their claims to established excellence. Under their sway legislation and regulations disseminated powers and functions proper to SAQA to a range of competing bodies.

Why and how this happened stands in need of deeper research. And in the last resort the government was liberal rather than radical and interventionist, and unable or unwilling to impose a new system – especially as it was confronted by challenges of restructuring in which even maintaining the inherited provision was a major achievement.

Dis-integration and neo-conservatism
Even a superficial acquaintance with the history of revolutions will make the durability of institutions and embedded interests clear. The inevitable restoration and re-institution of evolution after revolutions show both the survival of established patterns, and yet also deep changes in those patterns. Raffe, in the introduction to his paper, argues with some irony that the most successful NQFs build on what exists but lead to little transformation. Heyns and Needham's paper argues that there are indications

of major positive changes in the reality of integration in instructional design in South Africa at the level of practice, even while the integrated system is being pulled apart at the top. In trying to clarify why the system is being pulled apart, Heyns and Needham offer a well-documented argument attributing the dis-integration to turf wars at macro levels, to personal vendettas among the highly placed, and to the emerging academic "epistemological" orthodoxy.

The argument from epistemology was explored briefly by Lolwana and taken up especially strongly in one of the groups, running like a strand through its discussions. The epistemological turn in its most extreme form argues the incommensurability of horizontal and vertical knowledges. According to this theory, horizontal knowledge is gained in everyday experience and in the workplace and tends to be context-specific. Vertical knowledge is based in the traditional disciplines, is characteristically decontextualised and theory-rich. It is the knowledge that is said to be imparted on a significant scale only in institutions - in schooling and the academy. It is also the knowledge which leads to technical, social and economic empowerment, and is essential also for higher vocational and technical education. Horizontal knowledges such as workplace-based learning are valuable within their limits, but do not provide appropriate material for qualifications and are held to be increasingly inadequate in terms of competitive participation in the global economy. It is beyond the power of a system or a framework to allocate equal esteem to TVET and academic learning according to this thinking. It is the state's responsibility to promote general education and training, including the institutional aspects of TVET, but not the kind of integrated development of competence envisaged by the NQF.

Heyns and Needham show that there are alternatives to this argument, indicating that workplace-related learning can no longer be caricatured as a theoretical or cognitive tabula rasa, while modern industry competes with higher education as generators of new knowledge. In various group discussions as well, participants from industrial training spoke highly of the enrichment to training brought about by the requirements of NQF qualifications. While it was possible to trivialise these, in many case training had been taken well beyond older "monkey-see, monkey-do" types of training because of the demands of the NQF.

The argument from epistemology went together with a strong assertion of higher education's determination not to be subject to the demands of integration, and arguing the complete irrelevance of the industry-related NQF level 4 qualifications or FETCs to university access, while also expressing concern at the prospect of the introduction of the schooling FETC based on the new curriculum statement and replacing the senior certificate.

A new order, nonetheless…
The NQF has moved way beyond the initial formulation of these issues, and very few of the old guard of founders are still closely involved with it. Actual practices, approaches and systems have evolved through extended argument and compromise. Higher education (HE) asserted its autonomy, but participants in the colloquium pointed out that higher education has taken up many NQF requirements and opportunities, albeit on its own terms. There is little doubt that SAQA and HEQC requirements have made a difference to the way universities approach curriculum and assessment.

Griesel, in her response to Lolwana, reacts strongly to Lolwana's apparent fatalistic resignation to the inevitable power of HE, pointing out that HE is far from monolithic and that the sector is in many ways involved in facing huge challenges of access and quality - sometimes with innovation, and in a collaborative spirit. Her argument was echoed by various participants in the discussions.

The schooling system has taken up aspects of the NQF and used them in its own way, but could scarcely be called a partner in the NQF. Yet there are signs of rapprochement in the design of the FETC curriculum, and in some aspects of the handling of vocational FET. The technical and vocational side of further education and training is perhaps most strongly shaped by the NQF, whether in formal provision or in learnerships. It was pointed out at several moments in the colloquium that, because of the delays in finalising the NQF review process, different education and training structures preside over

systems that articulate poorly with one another – and even sometimes with themselves – and may speak to one another less clearly than they did before 1994.

In spite of reversals of fortune, the original political and moral passions continue to inspire, vex, limit and shape debates and decisions within the NQF. In the process the NQF continues to be defined in terms of objectives, principles and outcomes which bear remembering when approaching the papers and debates in the colloquium.

The ambitious political and moral ambitions of the NQF can be seen in the following formal commitments:

Objectives
The five SAQA objectives, as stated in the SAQA Act of 1995, are:

1.   to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2.   to facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3.   to enhance the quality of education and training;
4.   to accelerate the redress of unfair past discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and, thereby
5.   to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

Principles
SAQA has formally adopted the following Principles, more or less as they were formulated in the initial process:

•   Integration: Different systems and approaches to be brought together (e.g. theory and practice, and education and training).
•   Relevance: Education and training to be relevant to social, economic and political devement and to learner needs.
•   Credibility: Education and training system to have national and international value and acceptance.
•   Coherence: Areas of learning to be connected together in a framework of learning, which enables learners to move easily from one learning situation to another, building up certificates and credits as they go.
•   Flexibility: Different routes or pathways to lead to the same learning ends.
•   Standards-based: Programmes to be based on nationally and internationally accepted units of learning, which are structured around outcomes, and presented in a nationally agreed frame work.
•   Legitimacy: All national stakeholders to participate in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications.
•   Accessibility: Prospective learners to be able easily to enter the education and training system at the appropriate level to pursue relevant learning and career pathways.
•   Articulation: Learners to be able to move between the various parts of the education and training system as they complete each accredited unit.

- Progression: Learners to be able to move up and across the different levels of the education and training system, following various routes, and thereby to build up a national qualification.
- Portability: Learners to be able to transfer the credits and qualifications gained in one learning situation or institution to another.
- RPL: Credit to be given to learning that has already been acquired, e.g. through life experience or non-formal training courses.
- Guidance for learners: Learners to be assisted to understand and make decisions about entry into and progression through the education and training system.

The kind of learning required by the NQF is captured most forcefully in the listing of the seven critical outcomes. These are now quoted throughout general and further education and training, and – in spite of the tough challenges of realising them - are thought to be positively influencing the mode of instruction around the country.

Critical Cross-field Outcomes
- Identify and solve problems in which responses demonstrate that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made.
- Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community.
- Organise and manage oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively.
- Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
- Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and / or language skills in the modes of oral and / or written presentation.
- Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

According to the second phase of the NQF Impact Study, launched during the colloquium, these objectives, principles and outcomes are widely valued and increasingly acted on, though the extent and nature of the actual practices are not yet clear.

Raffe's analytical guidelines
Raffe's paper provided a refreshing framework for discussion against South Africa's complex political and aspirational use of the idea of integration. He emphasised that there was as yet no evidence from other countries that NQF's had achieved their more ambitious intentions. Even Scotland's NQF, widely viewed as successful, and based on long-established routines of recognition, threw up many of the problems experienced more intensely in other NQFs.

Raffe suggests that NQFs might be made more readily useful by observing a rule derived from his typology (see his Figure 10). This is, briefly, that NQFs work better if they are either loose and comprehensive, or tight and partial. If they attempt, for example, to be both tight and comprehensive they become unmanageable. Some of the discussions attempted to unpack these distinctions in terms of the South African NQF. The effort proved inconclusive and in need of further exploration, although it was felt that the typology offered a useful tool for strategic analysis.

Discussion was stimulated equally by Raffe's set of injunctions for interrogating the purposes and processes of integration. It was pointed out by one participant that we have sometimes got ourselves into Catch-22 situations by pursuing integration in ways that actually serve no purpose. It seems helpful to repeat his headings here:

- Clarify the meaning of an integrated framework
- Clarify the objectives of integration
- Make sure that the objectives are achievable

- Clarify the barriers to integration
- Make the framework as loose as possible, consistent with its (achievable) objectives
- Exploit the integrative possibilities of unitisation (Raffe strongly recommends starting with a national bank of units rather than whole qualifications)
- Progress in stages
- Coordinate with other policies (or work for what Raffe elsewhere calls "policy breadth")

The way in which these questions were picked up in some of the discussion groups showed their power to stimulate thoughtfulness about the NQF in general, and a suggestion was made that they be followed through more rigorously in relation to the South African NQF. Raffe's questions could be seen as providing a framework for an extended programme of research.

Imperfect progression – does it matter?

One group was reminded that a slogan often used in the early advocacy of the NQF was "From sweeper to engineer". This called for the removal of artificial and inessential barriers to progression, especially for those who had been held back by apartheid. Some participants believed that that there had been significant progress towards this ideal, but mainly within industry. However, some engineering faculties had responded positively to the quest for progression outside of formal routes and there were cases of learnerships linked to masters degrees in engineering. Griessel reminded the colloquium of a number of universities' programmes for alternative admissions that took learning from experience seriously, but it was also pointed out that intending students without a formal general education struggled with decontextualised and theoretical approaches to problems. Various participants pointed to outcomes-based education and training's (OBET) difficulty in dealing with the issue of progression, which created serious problems in the general education curriculum. Level descriptors seemed to pose chronic problems and were seen by some to be conceptually flawed, and it was often impossible to escape the specification of content if disciplinary knowledge was to be developed – including disciplinary knowledge needed in TVET. The visitors from Scotland, expert in the Scottish NQF, expressed astonishment at the radical de-linking of outcomes and content in the South African NQF.

These arguments were stimulated by Lolwana's wide-ranging paper. Lolwana was sceptical of the achievement of the NQF at the FET / HE interface. She stressed in discussion afterwards that her paper focused on the FET / HE interface because that is what she had been asked to speak about, not because she was overly focused on the interests of HE. It is clear from her paper that she is seriously concerned about the quality and status of TVET in South Africa. However, she is also realistic about the hold of the universities over public sentiment about the status of qualifications. Her paper shows a considerable ambivalence – that she argues is pragmatic – about the power of HE. On the one hand this power does seem to work against the original celebration of varied knowledges in the NQF, which she had espoused as keenly as anyone else. On the other, she is impressed by the emerging evidence of the importance of the traditional disciplines and curricula as an essential base for higher development and empowerment in the technical and vocational areas as much as in the pure sciences and humanities. Indeed, she argues that we need to look at long-established curricula and processes of curriculum development and quality management (notably examinations) that have proved themselves over time. In doing this, Lolwana is saying, in effect, that the time is past for considering that everything done by educators and trainers in the old order must have been in the service of evil interests, and to recognise the experience and rationality behind some of their practices.

One of Lolwana's interesting additions to NQF terminology is the idea of a "climbing framework". This is a framework in which each level is designed specifically with a view to preparing the learner to move on to the next level. Such a climbing framework usually consists of a range of sub-frameworks or sectoral frameworks. Lolwana presumably considers the provision of fundamentals and aspects of core in the NQF's line up of unit standards in a qualification to be inadequate for this. A climbing framework would require specific curriculum to supplement or replace unit standards.

Lolwana believes that South Africa needs to revisit the idea of a national curriculum. She is impressed by the work done on the new curriculum statements for the FETC. In terms of TVET, her experience suggested that the apprenticeship system may still offer a model worth following, especially in the separation of workplace experience and institutional learning of theory. In discussion, she argued that language, mathematics and technical drawing as general education subjects underpinned all more advanced TVET. Analysis being conducted by Umalusi (the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training headed by Dr Lolwana) was indicating that the National Education (NATED) curriculum should not be dismissed as it had recently tended to be.

A point touched on by Lolwana and taken up with some interest in the discussion was the possible need to revive South Africa's national testing capability. In the shift to a democratic order the country's testing services (notably the Central Organisation for Trade Testing [COTT], the Humans Sciences Research Council [HSRC] and the National Institute for Personnel Research [NIPR]) had been perceived as ideologically problematic and had been largely undermined. Yet this had "thrown the baby out with the bathwater". Performance assessment, for all its virtues, could not replace professional testing services; the two should be seen as complementary.

One participant complained that the discussions were narrowly limited because:

- the FET / HE interface seemed to refer to school and varsity, not even to FET Colleges
- HE, as in universities, dominated in spite of the small proportion of South Africans who were likely to get as far as HE
- HE was narrowly defined as university education: the roles of the universities of technology and the comprehensive universities were scarcely touched on, while private post-school diplomas and courses, professional pathways and similar alternatives to mainline university education were also neglected

The same participant reminded her group that one of the key original intentions of the NQF was to make a non-university route attractive to more people, so that one could increase the skills base and stop people wasting their time doing 'matrics' that were too often little more than empty rituals.

By the end of the colloquium there was agreement that progression may be encouraged by an NQF, but that it can never be assumed to be automatic. Ways of improving progression remain elusive.

Portability: letting the cat out of the bag

The original appeal of an NQF in South Africa depended very strongly on the appealing features of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT). The NQF that has emerged – and, as one participant pointed out, is still emerging – relies on key elements of a CAT system. It is unitised, in some ways modularised, and encourages the re-use of unit standards in different qualifications. It is decidedly intended to avoid situations where learners have to repeat learning programmes when they move to a different institution or undertake a different qualification. SAQA's National Learner's Records Database (NLRD) constitutes a huge investment in the permanence and credibility of records of learning, but also in effect, in the management of credit accumulation, if not transfer. SAQA's centre for the recognition of foreign qualifications is in effect concerned with providing reliable information to guide CAT decisions. Higher education regularly practices CAT within institutions and sometimes across institutions. However, it was pointed out that the new combined universities are having trouble recognising achieved learning within the institution themselves.

Given this situation, some participants were surprised to learn in Samuels' response to Hart's paper that the Minister and the Department of Education were contemplating the establishment of a CAT system, apparently as though this was entirely new. It is true, however, that the NQF is not a thorough-going CAT system. It allows for the accumulation of completed qualifications designed according to prescriptions for structuring and rules of combination rather than credits (involving processes which some participants felt were far too complex). But, as indicated above, it also allows for identical credits from one qualification to

build another qualification. Above all, the (still emerging) institution of recognition of prior learning (RPL) is almost entirely dependent on principles of CAT.

Hart's paper, presented as the colloquium ripened into its second day, stimulated the most intense discussion. The paper is refreshingly clear, with the clarity of expertise that has mastered labyrinthine complexities and drawn them into a taxonomy of interlinking facets. He points out aptly that "the appealing simplicity (of CAT) may be more apparent than real" and goes on to show that this is a gross understatement. The permutations and combinations of structures, intentions and effects are impossible to summarise adequately. Some of his points may be highlighted as being of special relevance to South Africa:

- Although an NQF can exist without any reference to CAT, CAT is essential for fulfilling the social objectives of an NQF
- CAT works best in a system that is tightly defined but loosely managed (As with Raffe's similar point, subsequent discussion showed that participants were not at all clear about what this might entail)
- Trust is important to allow recognition and to introduce openness in the acceptance of qualifications for further learning
- Accumulation and transfer are actually quite different issues, posing different challenges, and need to be considered separately
- Level descriptors are essential for credit rating, as "they provide indicative information on the complexity, creativity, sophistication and depth of learning which has to be demonstrated at a level"
- The distinction between general and specific credit needed to be maintained (Subsequent discussion also showed this point, which played on degrees of equivalence, to be useful but also a source of some confusion)

In contrast to the idea that workplace learning and formal learning are incommensurable, Hart mentioned that significant work was being done in the United Kingdom to develop appropriate formulae to allow credit value to be attached to workplace learning. (In one group it was pointed out that the status or lack of status of workplace learning has been the subject of bitter contention in South Africa.)

Hart ends by pointing to the need to work further on questions about the aims, processes and architecture of a CAT system if SAQA seeks to develop the basis that it already has for a full CAT system.

Samuels' response to Hart is appreciative and echoes many of the issues. However, Samuels points to the need to learn more than Hart had revealed about the weaknesses of CAT systems, especially in developing countries. Samuels' paper and even more his presentation were marked by the humour and passion of a tireless worker for the NQF and its values, but who is masking the deep frustration of a situation in which the short but intense life of the NQF is subject to four years of official indecision about structures and powers.

A participant afterwards pointed out the valuable work that SAQA had done in the building of the NQF, and sympathised with the frustration that must be felt at having worked through to decisions based on commendable transparency and openness to criticism, only to find these treated by key stakeholders as though they were arbitrary and dispensable.

The discussion groups ranged far and wide around the subject of CAT. One theme was captured in the question, "Why the fuss?" Here there were suspicions that CAT was just another tool for "gatekeeping as an end in itself". More seriously, there were concerns about building yet more complex self-perpetuating structures that had lost touch with their raisons d'être. It was pointed out that transfers and accumulation happened in informal ways or through institutional accommodations when the need really exists, as it were in a relatively unregulated, rather chaotic market place. Was it not better to go on in that way rather than formalise into structures that complicated the obvious? There were criticisms of the NQF mostly

on the basis of perceived complexity. The ETQA model was said to be too decentralised, and to encourage the multiplication of providers, so that in the end quality was lost rather than assured. On the one hand, there was a call to relax the regulatory aspects of the NQF, on the other a pointing to the need to close the many gaps between registered standards which made it difficult to institute a full CAT system. The lack of grading in the design of assessment against unit standards was also seen as an inhibition to transfer, if not to accumulation.

A particular concern was that unit standards – the building blocks of CAT – were idealistically loaded with too much importance: they were meant to do all the good things like including theory and practice, embedded knowledge, critical outcomes etc, and differentiating between levels such as 2 and 3. A participant argued that most unit standards do not capture what they are supposed to, and maybe cannot.

On the positive side, CAT was seen to endorse and recognise expensive specific training offered by employers in ways that had not been possible before. The NQF had actively facilitated accumulation of credits (notably in industrial education and training) even though it was largely powerless to oblige institutions to transfer credits when the institutions did not find the credits to have adequate levels of equivalence to match their learning programmes. This was one of the factors that inhibited institutional buy-in to the NQF. The NLRD had huge potential to facilitate articulation, but was not doing this yet.

An especially useful point reiterated in the session was the idea that partial CAT systems were perfectly acceptable, especially if ways were available for articulating with credits or qualifications not based in CAT. To some extent South Africa has this already and it may be a good idea to undertake a descriptive study of how it functions – an approach which would fit with a colloquium *Leitmotiv*: that we should build on what exists.

SAQA was commended on the achievement of so much towards a CAT system given an effective existence of five or six years since it became operational. Pleas were made and strongly endorsed for yet more public education around the workings of the NQF and the benefits of CAT.

Some generalities

The synopsis of the colloquium offered so far does not make clear the extent to which the notion of communities of trust dominated – or perhaps rather, haunted – the discussions. The term was sometimes replaced by *zones of trust, or communities of practice*. However, these variants provided no greater clarity on what the term might mean in reality and participants used it either loosely or with understanding that remained private. The closest one could get to it was the idea of users of qualifications (employers, admissions officers) who had a sufficient shared understanding with the providers of the qualifications to be able to accept their *bona fides* without having to interrogate or investigate the qualification. Presumably, the communities of trust are meant to play roles of what one might call curricular or cultural affinity. Such roles can in no ways be replaced by specification and quality assurance regimes, however rigorous. As we have seen above, the NQF was created in a context of deep suspicion and was in a sense intended to compensate for an almost universal loss of trust. However, one participant pointed out that the NQF, and specifically its descriptive national standards, had been seen by some as starting points for the development of a new consensus about what constitutes quality in education and training. Some concurred and expressed the belief that a new consensus was indeed emerging, though much more slowly than had originally been hoped. Others felt that the way that qualifications had been structured in the NQF had worked against the development of shared cultures of quality in different learning areas.

Another possible reason for failure to promote communities of trust was the introduction of comprehensive and complex new quality assurance procedures without a process of development located in specific content. The early training of assessors in generic assessment practices was a case in point. Too little attention was given to collective work in the formation of good judgements in specific

contextualised practices. This had created misleading impressions of how assessment in the NQF was meant to work. The solution has been crafted through corrective design of assessor standards by SAQA and a more rigorous programme evaluation process from the Education and Training Development Practitioners (ETDP) Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA). Required assessment practices are now closely attentive to context and the particularity of disciplines or skills.

Similarly, Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) had to find and train suitable people from their sectors to conduct accreditation processes, verify assessments and evaluate programmes. Putting in place the appropriate policies and processes and attracting the right people to implement them in a credible manner has, not surprisingly, taken time, and in some areas practice still leaves much to be desired. However, there is no doubt that in many areas significant improvements in quality .

The emphasis in the South African NQF on transparent stakeholder participation in the development of qualifications should have made a major contribution to the development of communities of trust. Paradoxically, the effect may have been the opposite. This was partly because of the reduced role of professional educators and trainers and of subject specialists and curriculum experts, whose knowledge and experience was often placed on an equal footing with non-specialist worker and employer representatives. There was some perception that this required serious compromises of quality. Since those who held these perceptions were the relatively sidelined educators and trainers, the problems created by the breakdown of a shared vision should have been predictable.

It was pointed out that this problem was one characteristic of the new South Africa. The struggle for democracy had included an intense critique of expertise (usually white, male, western). This had led to frequent confusions of roles. In the development of OBET particularly, there had been a situation where stakeholders designed processes that should have been undertaken by experts, while experts were brought in belatedly to approve or improve seriously flawed design.

Another observation was that OBET has a disarmingly persuasive logic, yet aspects of OBET can be misunderstood and experienced as counter-intuitive by educators and trainers. Practitioners still too often treat unit standards as inputs or tables of contents for courses rather than as descriptions of outcomes to be determined in assessment. Continuing work is needed to scaffold the paradigm shift to OBET. Failures in successfully negotiating the shift lead sometime to absurd practices which are far from the intentions of the NQF, but which still inhibit the development of communities of trust.

As can be seen here, the discussion of communities of trust involved a considerable amount of conjecture. The idea needs much clarification before its usefulness can be ascertained. But it is very clear from the whole colloquium that SAQA needs to act urgently not merely to communicate what it stands for, but draw education and training structures into influential communication at the level of their concern. How this could be done must be one of the main topics for research.

A second recurring area of concern was prominent more for the protests about its absence than the apparent concern. This was the NQF's claim to be a social construct, and – more usefully – its very clear social purposes. As was seen above, the NQF was especially designed to serve the marginalised while also promoting South Africa's competitiveness in strategic high skills. The balance does not seem to have been sustained.

Perhaps the most drastic response to this issue was the view that the knowledge and skills needed by the marginalised, the rural poor, those who have missed out on formal education were not appropriate subjects for qualifications. They might well deserve to be national priorities more important than, for example, questions of access to HE. But the needs of the marginalised could better be addressed by appropriate non-formal provision (plus the appropriate quality assurance) without being linked into a qualifications system. In the rare cases where such provision created demands for progression or portability, this could be dealt with through placement procedures or open learning approaches. To take this line, however, is to set aside the NQF's cherished principles relating to redress and access.

Common sense was called upon to use qualifications or standards where they could help, as in the fundamentals but not in very basic practical skills. It was also pointed out that expecting every short course in further professional development to update a qualification could make the general approach look ridiculous.

Again, the discussion pointed clearly to the need for research and development around the idea of communities of trust.

Towards a research agenda

In the last session the groups were called upon to give attention to the design of a research agenda for the NQF. The result is captured well in the programme generated by one group This centred on the quest for a "forward looking research agenda". The proposed elements of such an agenda were:

• Systems change and innovation, including clarifying the new conditions and context within which the NQF was operating
• Relationships with partners or stakeholders, and specifically the building of communities of trust
• A differentiated consideration of the different sectors and their relationship to the NQF-HE, VET, FET and workplaces
• The working of unit standards and quality systems and their relationship to curricula, including the idea of national curriculum
• Attention to the capabilities and capacities of institutions, sub-systems and individuals in relation to the NQF
• A new look at outcomes, how they impacted on system change, and how they related to inputs and processes
• How the NQF contributed to the implementation of good pedagogical practices in different spheres

During the launch of the NQF Impact Study Report for the second phase which was linked to the colloquium, Vinjevold made an urgent request that the impact study start looking not only at perceptions of change, but at how NQF structures and practices were actually impacting on the way learning happens in South Africa. This could be extended to looking at actual improvements or problems in access, redress and so on. Numbers of participants called for the researched presentation of NQF success stories for the sake of more effective advocacy. Flowing from points made by Lolwana and others, special attention might be given to the effects of the emphasis on assessment, such as the study recently undertaken by the DoE and the Independent Examination Board (IEB) on assessment at the end of Grade 9 and the readiness for a General Education and Training Certificate (GETC).

Beyond these explicit recommendations, one might discern numbers of questions for research. Not all of these are appropriate for the SAQA research team, but might be commissioned or encouraged, for example as topics for post-graduate research.

• The question of the social purposes of the NQF needs exploration. Are these purposes workable? Is the NQF the appropriate vehicle? If so, how might the somewhat dormant purposes be developed in the most strategic manner possible?
• What are the actual roles of and what are the appropriate influences of HE in determining general and further education and training curriculum and standards?
• To what extent has the NQF actually promoted a valuing of different knowledges? Is promoting such a valuing a viable principle for the NQF?
• How has the distribution of expert / stakeholder roles affected the design of the NQF? How might the relationship of the two be put on the most productive footing?
• How real is the perceived counter-intuitiveness of OBET and unit standards design? If it is a significant factor, how might it be effectively dealt with?

- How could integration be conceptualised so that it avoids some of the major conundrums, such as the problem of giving status to valuable qualifications with out forcing them into the mould and content demanded by access to inappropriate learning programmes?
- Is there any validity in the observation that the balance between knowledge and performance has been very poorly achieved in the NQF? If so, how might a balance be achieved that satisfies academic admissions officers and employers?
- How might Raffes's matrix of Partial / Comprehensive, Loose / Tight be effectively deployed in the further shaping of the NQF?
- Is there validity in the observation that the NQF ignores institutional interests? If so, how might it accommodate the power of institutional interests while providing credits and qualifications that do not necessarily rely on the standing of institutions? For example, does the UK research into the recognition of non-institutional workplace learning speak to our situation?
- What stresses has NQF theory placed on the official provision of general education, and what might be the reasons for the partial alienation in this respect?
- To what extent have educational policies and reforms in South Africa, like the NQF, faltered not because they were conceptually flawed, but because they were under-resourced? What can be made of the findings on this question?
- To what extent have educational policies and reforms in South Africa, like the NQF, faltered not because they were conceptually flawed, but because they were not evolutionary and did not build on what existed? What can be made of the findings on this question?

Many more research issues can be gleaned from the proceedings of the colloquium. No order of priority should be inferred from what has been outlined here.

Back to the beginning

At the beginning of this synopsis I promised to clarify the title I have given it.

Only connect?
"Only connect…" was the injunction with which E M Forster prefaced his novel *Howard's End*, now a Merchant Ivory film. The novel is about the hopefulness and the challenges in overcoming the rifts between action and thought, business and culture, middle class and working class. It is about the tough, ongoing human calling to integration.

I have added a question mark to the injunction to stress that the quest to connect needs to be interrogated. So much in the NQF is about making connections – not only the connections required of integration, articulation, progression and portability, but also between our first and second economies, with their consequences of personal distress and cultural disjunction.

One of the enduring tasks of connection relates to the interplay of the revolution demanded by abstract principle and the evolution demanded by given social structure. The issue was raised when Lolwana expressed regret that we had attempted a revolution, when evolution would have worked better. The argument is handled with great illumination in Connor Cruise O'Brien's T S Eliot lectures[21]. In these lectures he writes as a socialist, but the subjects of his lectures are some of the great conservatives in intellectual history. (Machiavelli, Burke, Nietzsche, Yeats.) O'Brien shows how much those on the left, all concerned with radical change for justice, need to learn from right-wing thinkers. Burke, especially, celebrates the enduring quality of social institutions and values and the hidden rationality that may be deeper at times than the explicit rationality of the left. O'Brien's point is that those seeking major change ignore, at the peril of their projects, a sense of the tougher textures of established social structures.

The NQF may err on the side of explicit rationality. It is perhaps right that those who care for what the NQF stands for should study more thoroughly how the NQF's sometimes startling innovations relate to

the way actual institutions, practitioners, public, value qualifications, learning, curriculum and assessment, and then build on the foundations that are revealed.

Another connection that needs to be made is between past, present and future. The SAQA research team are in search of a future-oriented curriculum. Yet the NQF has at least fifteen years of history behind it now. In many ways the original intentions and the politics of the NQF's founding persist in newer forms. The NQF thus far must be seen as a laboratory of change. There may be much to learn from the past for the future.

A closing thought: Integration and atonement
In his colloquium paper Raffe writes that integration is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. (Perhaps, given the gist of his paper, it should rather be seen as many means to many ends.) From one point of view he is quite right. Yet there is a way in which integration is an end in itself. Wholeness and integrity come as close to being human ends as anything else. The idea of integration in the NQF is not purely strategic and functional. It has in it the character of a moral imperative as well. This is all the more so against the background of segregation and the dis-integration of personality, truth, knowledge and competence that segregation entailed.

In the NQF we are making atonement - "at-one-ment" (the etymology is not concocted). Atonement sounds final. In reality it is a recurring act and is done both to get past the evils of the past and clear the way to the future. In some religions it is celebrated once a year, in others once a week. So one is expected to lose it and to have to pick up the pieces again and get them into a new integration. The proceedings of the colloquium suggest that SAQA's research agenda must be how to pick up the pieces and put them together anew, in the understanding that this will be done again … and again… and…

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[21] *The suspecting glance.* (The T S Eliot memorial lectures delivered at Eliot College, in the University of Kent at Canterbury, November 1969.) London : Faber & Faber, 1972.