

Canadian International Development Agency supports a learning nation

In the third year of its current project (2002-2006) to support SAQA in overseeing the implementation of the NQF, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has continued to fund the development of SAQA's *NQF Support Link* initiative.

The *NQF Support Link* is a major product of the education and training portfolio of the co-operation agreement between the Governments of South Africa and Canada. The *NQF Support Link* consists of key NQF implementation leadership learning resources, for delivery through three mechanisms: print, CD-Rom and on-line.

The *NQF Support Link* initiative is geared towards making a significant contribution to the nature and quality of learning and teaching, the initial target audience being the governing, chief executive and senior programme leadership of the Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and of other organisations with which these Colleges are required to work in fulfilling their respective mandates. It is aimed, in particular, at ensuring that the quality and responsiveness of the programmes offered by the FET Colleges meet the massive and rapid growth in intermediate skills needs as set out in the government's skills agenda, consistent with the requirements of the NQF.

Achievements

Specifically, CIDA's funding support this year has ensured continuation of two principal phases of work that will lead to the launch of the *NQF Support Link* in June 2005. These phases were undertaken with South African and Canadian leadership and expertise, in a continuing CIDA-funded project partnership between SAQA and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (Canada). The two principal phases of work under this project during the year were:

- *Completion and testing of the initial package of core modules of the NQF Support Link and of the three learning resources delivery mechanisms mentioned above.* The content and the delivery application, through a Learning Management System, have been both well developed and field-tested, and six leadership learning modules are ready for delivery in the following areas:
 - Implementing the NQF
 - The NQF and Strategic Governance
 - The NQF and Learning Programmes
 - The NQF and Assessment
 - The NQF and Learnerships
 - The NQF, Information Systems and the National Learners' Records Database.

Six unit standards have also been developed and are registered on the NQF, to enable *NQF Support Link* participants to gain credits towards qualifications for their learning.

- *Initiation of a Strategic Action Plan and Marketing Framework for the period January to December 2005.* This process will enable SAQA to assume, in a phased approach, full overall leadership for implementation and further development of the *NQF Support Link* prior to the conclusion of the CIDA Support Project in March 2006.

A programme of capacity building and technical support is now well under way, with a view to ensuring that:

- the *NQF Support Link* is well embedded in the SAQA organisation and processes, particularly through capacity building of SAQA staff assigned to deliver and further develop the initiative; and
- the *NQF Support Link* can be offered on a cost-recovery basis to a diverse and large group of learners, as the basis for further efforts towards long-term sustainability of the initiative.

One of the most notable strengths of the *NQF Support Link* is that it is an open learning system, allowing flexibility for College leaders, including College CEOs, governing council members and other decision-making structures within Colleges, to access custom designed and field tested materials that support NQF implementation. This, in turn, ensures the development and implementation of programmes, mechanisms and capacity development for teaching personnel that are focused on quality, relevance of learning and on alignment of College programmes with the needs of industry (for example, learning programmes, assessment processes and learnerships).

This initiative, together with the NQF Forums that have been established by SAQA in all the main centres, will continue to promote and build a strong understanding of the NQF across South Africa. As SAQA looks forward to its further contributions to the development of a learning nation, it notes with pride that while the current set of *NQF Support Link* materials focuses on the needs of the leadership of FET Colleges and of other targeted organisations, most of the content is also geared for use in any education and training organisation or institution seeking to respond constructively to the requirements, opportunities and other benefits of the NQF. The *NQF Support Link* materials content has been designed and presented in such a way that it can, in due course, be adapted, re-sorted, re-purposed and re-packaged by SAQA for use by other sectors of the education and training system.



C Lambert (left) T Douglas and J Arnesen: NQF Support Link Task Team

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