

The Directorate: National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) manages SAQA's comprehensive database of learner achievements. This involves capturing and updating data on a regular basis to ensure that a reliable and effective information system is in place.

In the period under review, the NLRD:

- published the report *Trends in Public Higher Education in South Africa 1992 to 2001*;
- became a fully-fledged directorate;
- recorded new qualifications and unit standards on its database;
- completed the *Information Administrator* Learnership; and
- maintained an information infrastructure that supports its database.

Highlights

Publication

In 2004, the first publication based on an analysis of relevant NLRD data *Trends in Public Higher Education in South Africa 1992 to 2001*, was produced. It highlighted the fact that between 1992 and 2001, an increasing number of qualifications had been awarded to black (African, Indian, and Coloured) people and to women and that the total number of people in South Africa with qualifications from public higher education institutions had almost doubled. As more South Africans obtain qualifications, thereby contributing to building a learning nation, these trends are expected to continue. In her keynote address at the launch of the report in November 2004, the Minister of Education promised to present the publication to Cabinet, which she did on 21 January 2005. The Minister commented as follows in her address:

The important role of the National Learners' Records Database in gathering together this data and providing critical information to government, the private sector, analysts, opinion makers, and decision-makers is now more evident than ever before.

This publication, drawn from the database, also assists in fulfilling one of government's commitments (6.1.2 in the economic cluster "Establish register of all graduates") in its programme of action announced during the President's May State of the Nation address this year.

All of us should read the publication and study it.

Searchable database

The number of searchable databases on the SAQA website increased to four with the addition of a database of qualifications and unit standards between the stages of public comment and registration. At 31 March 2005, there were 507 new qualifications and 7 845 unit standards on the NLRD. The four databases track their status from public comment through to registration and show the 7 667 provider-based qualifications previously recorded.

NLRD Directorate

In the year under review, the NLRD became a fully-fledged directorate and can now start recruiting more staff to help fulfil its mandate. The Directorate, responsible for one of SAQA's three key deliverables, aids governmental research and decision-making on the labour market and education and training, and enables individual learners to verify their achievements or to request verification by potential/current employers and/or employment agencies.

Value-added information

Several employment agencies and potential employers verified the qualifications of their applicants via the NLRD. The possibility of batch verifications for some organisations was explored, and these will probably take place in the forthcoming year.



First learners to complete their two year learnership at SAQA
Back row: K Moko, C Oelofsen,
M Mwangware, A van Zyl
Front row: Y Shapiro (Director)
and S Makengo



A van Zyl and C Oelofsen
on graduation day



Second intake of learners:
(standing) J Mariemuthu
(left), S Monageng,
S Khumalo, Y Soldati and
K Naidu (seated)
N Baartman, L Zondo
and T Ntuli (right)

Commissioned analyses of the aggregated learner data (separate from the production of the NLRD publication) were undertaken. A quantitative analysis of the information on qualifications and unit standards contained in the NLRD was done as part of SAQA's NQF Impact Study (Cycles 1 and 2).

The NLRD team successfully dealt with a range of queries about qualifications and unit standards, based on the contents of the four searchable databases.

Because of popular demand for a facility that can download the full content of qualifications and unit standards to other databases, a web page making use of XML functionality will be set up for the use of subscribers.

Capturing data via the Information Administrator Learnership

SAQA has continued to build a learning nation through active participation in learnerships. Five of the original ten SAQA incumbents of the *Information Administrator* Learnership completed their second year, and two of them passed all their examinations.

Summary of Information held on the NLRD as at 31 March 2005	
Learners:	5 423 989
Qualification achievements of these learners:	5 828 927
Course achievements:	25 612 070
Unit standard achievements:	still being loaded
Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs):	
Currently registered:	91
Have completed their registration periods:	75
Proposed:	31
De-registered or withdrawn:	59
National Standards Bodies (NSBs):	
Provider-based qualifications:	12
	7 667
<u>New qualifications:</u>	
Currently registered:	643 (includes 28 reregistered)
Increase during this reporting period:	262
<u>New unit standards:</u>	
Currently registered:	8 490 (includes re-registered)
Increase during this reporting period:	2 764
Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs):	35
Qualifications used in learnerships:	520

The learners captured all the qualifications and unit standards for registration on the NQF, as well as details concerning SGBs and NSBs and their membership, provider details, and the links between ETQAs and the qualifications and unit standards that each of them quality-assures.

A second group of eight learners commenced their two-year stint at SAQA in February 2005. The same Learnership has run successfully at some ETQAs, focusing on capturing data for transmission to the NLRD. Of the 22 learners who started at various ETQAs at the beginning of 2004, 15 completed their first year and 13 continued into 2005 under the guidance of the Data/Learnership Co-ordinator based at SAQA.

Gathering and loading learner data

After receipt of Umalusi's 1992 – 2001 Senior Certificate data, 5 423 989 learners and their achievements are now recorded on the NLRD. Data from technikons (as they were called) for the years prior to 1999 was obtained from the individual institutions, while that for 1999 onwards was obtained from the Department of Education's Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS).

All acceptable data from ETQAs has also been loaded. The quality of their data has increased substantially over the past year, mainly because of:

- the contribution of the Information Administrator Learnership incumbents based at the ETQAs;
- the purchase of dedicated NLRD data-testing software (Edu. Dex) and its utilisation by the Data/Learnership Co-ordinator;
- the data-quality feedback reports given to each ETQA;
- continued discussions at the NLRD Partners Forum; and
- the NLRD's ETQA League Table as a motivating force. The latter was set up in May 2004, to award "green" status to ETQAs performing best at transmitting acceptable data to the NLRD, and "red" to those that were unsuccessful. Of the 35 ETQAs, eight are currently green, 11 are yellow, seven amber and seven red. The other two (purple) have inadequate systems in place to record information.

Of the 232 files received for testing since the inception of the League Table, 102 (44%) have been found acceptable and have been loaded onto the NLRD, a great improvement on the previous success rate of 15%.

A shortcoming that is being addressed by the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) is the gathering of learner achievement information from private higher institutions and transmitting it to the NLRD. However, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) data was received from the Independent Examinations Board (IEB), and further ABET data is being obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA).

NLRD infrastructure

Available storage space was increased substantially by upgrading the server hardware at the end of 2004. The improved information technology (IT) environment at SAQA has ensured excellent shutdowns and start-ups when required, as well as trustworthy backups. The information infrastructure supporting the NLRD (data-load specifications, data-load procedures, look-up tables, user profiles and other security measures), as well as the Oracle database, was maintained at a high level of efficacy.