INVITATION TO INITIATE AND PARTICIPATE IN DEBATES SURROUNDING THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NQF

In an effort to make the Bulletin a forum for the exchange of information on the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the Editor invites stakeholders and role players in the education and

training sector – and indeed the public at large – to submit for publication in a Letters section of the SAQA Bulletin correspondence either in response to articles in the Bulletin or on issues surrounding the development and implementation of the NQF.

In addition, the Editor extends an invitation to all who are concerned with developing and implementing the NQF to contribute for publication in a Provider News section of the Bulletin brief accounts of policy development and NQF implementation strategies that might stimulate other providers of education and training to undertake similar courses of action in their own learning areas. Contributions, addressed to "The Editor, SAQA Bulletin", may be mailed to Postnet Suite 248, Private Bag X06, WATERKLOOF, 0145, South Africa; faxed to +27 12 346-5814; or e-mailed either via the SAQA web-site to saqainfo@saqa.org.za or to anne@saqa.org.za.

THE STATUS OF ARTICLES IN THE SAQA BULLETIN

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

EDITORIAL COMMENT

This Bulletin focuses almost exclusively on initiatives and the experience of overseas experts who are working in NQF-type environments in their own countries. In addition, the initiatives at bench-marking South African experiences with those of other developing and developed countries are described. These initiatives raise a number of questions about the desirability of international bench-marking experiences. There are those who view the exercise as an 'academic colonisation' of South Africa by the international community and hence should be avoided at all costs, while there are others who believe that South African qualifications will have no credibility unless they are bench-marked against international equivalents. What cannot be ignored, is the fact that SAQA is obliged by the SAQA Act, to ensure the international comparability of South African qualifications registered on the NQF.

The challenge for South African educators and trainers is the engagement with these issues, not only in order to debate the pros and cons of such exercises, but to see whether they can assist in the development of the NQF for the benefit of our country. For instance, is there a relationship between RPL and international bench-marking exercises which could be explored to see whether the experience gained in such exercises can assist in the development of fair, reliable and valid methodologies of dealing with some of the issues in RPL? Prof Parker's article suggests that engagement with the NQF is a choice and instead of keeping a distance, practitioners and academics in South Africa should take up the challenges and engage with the issues that are raised - through engagement, there is the opportunity to shape the NQF.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

By Dennis Gunning

This paper was presented to SAQA staff by Dennis Gunning during his visit to South Africa in October 1999.

Background

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is being developed at the moment in Scotland. It is an attempt to pull together all the qualifications for which there is government accountability in Scotland into a single framework based on the concepts of level and credit points.

The first point to make about SCQF is that it is not a development which started with a blank sheet of paper. Unlike other countries which have reformed their qualifications framework completely and placed the whole framework under a single authority, Scotland already had a well-developed system under two authorities – SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) for all Scottish qualifications except degrees and QAA (the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) for degrees.

SQA, when it was set up, was given responsibility by the government for all national qualifications in Scotland except university degrees. Centres such as schools, colleges and workplaces are accountable to SQA for the running of our qualifications and the result is an SQA certificate, not a certificate issued by the centre. By contrast, universities operate as degree awarding bodies in their own right and issue their own certificates. The creation of a national framework which included both SQA qualifications and degrees therefore had to be achieved by collaboration and partnership, not by legislation or by force.

SAQA readers should remember that SQA has two main roles. It is the awarding body (i.e. ETQA) for all Scottish qualifications except degrees. It is the sole awarding body for National and Higher National Qualifications (those used by schools, colleges etc as "capability" qualifications) and is one of a number of competing awarding bodies for the workplace-competence qualifications (the SVQs).

For SVQs, SQA also plays the accreditation role (the SAQA role) – that is, it accredits the work of the 100 or so National Training Organisations who set the SVQ standards and it accredits the 30 or so awarding bodies (ETQAs) who run the SVQs. SQA itself is by far the biggest awarding body for SVQs; while playing this awarding role, it is subject to accreditation and audit by the SQA's own Accreditation Unit. To avoid conflicts, this Unit is separate from, and accountable to a different committee from, the awarding body arm of SQA

In discussions between SQA and QAA's Scottish Office, it became clear that the reforms of the last 25 years had led to increasing commonality between qualifications of SQA and of higher education. For example, SQA's own higher education qualifications (HNC and HND) have for a number of years been part of the universities' credit-rating system. Also, universities were increasingly moving to modular degree programmes and were becoming more amenable to discussion of definition of outcomes-based assessment.

There were therefore early discussions between SQA and QAA on the possibility of pulling all qualifications into a single national framework and the momentum for this was increased by the publication of the government's recent review into the higher education system. This review recommended the development of national qualifications frameworks for the UK. Frameworks is in the plural because the UK does not have a single system of qualifications!

The government in Scotland endorsed the recommendations and listed the development of a Scottish framework as one of the main policy proposals in the its policy paper on lifelong learning, *Access and Opportunity*.

Following discussions between SQA and QAA, it was agreed that a development partnership should be set up to take this work forward. The partners for this work were SQA, QAA (Scottish Office), the Scottish Executive (the civil service of the new Scottish parliament), the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access. It was also agreed that a Joint Advisory Group with wider stakeholder representation should be set up to oversee the development and guide the development partners. The intention is to appoint a high-profile chairman for the group – this appointment has yet to be agreed with the government.

The initial outcome of the discussions between the partners has been a consultation paper on the possible shape of the SCQF, entitled Adding Value to Learning. This was published in April 1999 and sent to all providers and stakeholders. The results of that consultation are now being analysed but seem to indicate broad support. The next stage is to reflect the outcomes of the consultation in a definitive publication which will be discussed by the Joint Advisory Group and will then form the basis of SCQF's full implementation, probably by mid-2000.

So the key piece of background to remember is that the SCQF is not a "from scratch" development – instead, it is a rationalising framework which pulls together existing qualifications of the two national accountability bodies, SQA and QAA.

Aims of SCQF

As the previous section describes, SCQF is intended to pull together the SQA and higher education qualifications into a single national framework. There are three main aims for this; to provide

- a route map for individuals and organisations which use qualifications
- a design template for future national initiatives which involve qualifications
- a basis for accumulation and transfer of credit into and between qualifications.

Each of these is described in more detail below.

Route Map

National qualifications systems are complicated! This is almost inevitable if the qualifications available are going to match the huge range of needs which they serve.

In Scotland, qualifications are available in a range of sizes, from individual units (sometimes called "modules") to full programmes lasting several years, and in a range of specialist and sectoral areas; they cover candidates ranging from those with special needs to those completing a postgraduate degree..

People trying to decide how they want to progress from their current level of knowledge and skills need a simple guide to help them to make the best choice. Similarly, users of qualifications, such as employers and higher education staff, need to be able to relate a particular qualification to their needs.

A national framework ought to provide such a map to help people plan their personal and professional progression route to lifelong learning and to help employers and others understand how to understand the qualifications held by employees and applicants. Employers also need to be able to make judgements about the training needs of their employees – the framework should help guide these judgements too.

Design Template

Government departments dealing with industry or employment issues are often not well informed on the most recent developments in education. Most recently, for example, the UK government launched its "New Deal" scheme to help tackle unemployment but the nature of the programme did not fit with the requirements of the national qualifications which New Deal participants were to aim to achieve.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has been welcomed by all sectors of the community and is supported by the Scottish Parliament. Its development partners therefore expect that it will therefore be used by government as the basis for all future initiatives so that achievements can be mapped onto the framework and can encourage further learning.

A Basis for Credit Accumulation and Transfer

In Scotland, people are increasingly using flexible approaches to learning. This can mean

- flexibility in timing – for example, through part-time study;
- flexibility in the method of learning – for example, through open learning or computer-based learning;
- flexibility in routes – for example, through the achievement of units in college and in the workplace.

A modular qualifications system is ideally suited to meeting the needs of learners using such flexible approaches because the size, nature and pace of learning can be matched to units in the qualifications framework. For those learners aiming for a qualification such as a certificate, diploma or degree, it is important that all achievements offer at least the possibility of being accumulated towards that qualification. This is particularly important as an issue when the achievement spans traditional boundaries; thus, for example, it is rare for someone who has achieved a workplace qualification (an SVQ) in management to be able to gain credit from this qualification towards an MBA. The SCQF should give the basis for such credit.

The appendix contains a more detailed discussion of SCQF from the point of view of its features and explores the implications of those features for the design of qualifications. In summary, however, the SCQF framework is built uo using the allocation of levels and SCQF points. The first is a measure of demand or difficulty and the second is a measure of designed learning time (10 hours = 1 SCQF point).

A national lifelong learning record?

Levels and SCQF points also provide a possible basis for summarising lifelong learning achievement; SQA is investigating whether this type of summary might be included at the end of its Scottish Qualifications Certificate as a table, or perhaps a histogram. For example:

SCQF Level   *12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1*

SCQF Points Total   *- - - 10 120 120 480 500 40 - - -*

SCQF Points in Last Year   *- - - 10 120 - - - 10 - -*

The "last year" column shows the person who has just completed

- his or her Higher National Diploma (the second year -120 points at level 8)
- a more advanced module (10 points at level 9)
- a basic module (10 points at level 4 – perhaps this might be an introductory modern languages unit for a tourist).

The "points total" column shows the other 120 points at level 7 which are also required for the Diploma and the range of points at levels 4, 5 and 6 which the person previously achieved at school. In Scotland, such a table would chart all qualifications from age 14 upwards and may be introduced from summer 2000. Its ultimate utility will depend on whether agreement can be reached on data transfer of achievement in higher education institutions onto the SQA database (this is highly political!)

Summary

Scotland has been reforming its national qualifications system constantly for almost 30 years. These reforms, each of which addressed problems in a particular part of the qualifications framework, are now coming together to produce a flexible, coherent and comprehensive portfolio of qualifications to meet the needs of the economy, employment and the individual. The reform of the qualifications system has been supported by the people of Scotland, who traditionally place great value in the benefits of education and training

We are now at the point where the two major parts of the qualifications system, that run by SQA and that of the Scottish universities, are coming together through partnership into a single Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. This framework has attracted widespread support from all sections of the community and from all levels in the education and training sector and is seen by the Scottish Parliament as a key component of its strategy for improving education and training, widening access and promoting lifelong learning.

The national system of education, training and qualifications and the national economic aims of a country are closely linked and have to be planned together. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, together with the rigorous quality system which ensures stability in the standards of our qualifications, provide Scotland with an ideal foundation on which to improve the knowledge and skills of its people. This is the key to building competitiveness in world markets and to attracting and retaining high-skill, high-value employment opportunities in our country.

APPENDIX

Features of SCQF

Overview

In order to meet the range of needs within a single national framework, certain key features are required. Only the first is discussed in detail in this appendix. In the Scottish framework, these features are:

- parameters which define the place of a qualification in the framework
- design criteria for individual qualifications
- a quality assurance system to ensure stable standards
- a national certification system
- widespread public understanding and acceptance.

Parameters which define the place of a qualification in the framework

Types of qualification

In the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, there are two broad types of units and qualification with distinctive purposes.

The first is designed to prepare people for progression to further study or to employment. These units and qualifications could therefore be said to be about capability. There are twelve levels here, stretching from those designed for people with special needs to those at postgraduate level. There are three broad groupings within those twelve levels – National Qualifications (levels 1 to 7), Higher National Qualifications (levels 7 and 8) -both the responsibility of SQA - and Degrees (levels 7 to 12) -the responsibility of the Scottish universities.

The second type of unit and qualification is designed to allow people to show that they can perform to full job competence standards. These units and qualifications (SVQs) require to be assessed in the conditions of the workplace and have five levels of qualification, ranging from operative and artisan through to professional.

These two types of qualification evolved at different times and to meet different needs. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework attempts to bring them together by equating the different sets of levels to each other. The whole framework therefore looks like this

Level	Capability	Competence
12	Postgraduate degree	
11	Masters degree	SVQ5
10	Honours degree	
9	Bachelors degree	

8	| Higher National	SVQ4
7	| Qualifications	

6		SVQ3
5		SVQ2
4	National	SVQ1
3	Qualifications	
2		
1		

Readers should note that the positioning of the qualifications in the table really represents a statement of the units completed at output level, not their average level. Thus, for example, an Honours degree in Scotland requires the accumulation of a fixed number of unit credit points at levels 7, 8, 9 and 10. There is yet to be a debate in Scotland about whether the concept of level is meaningful for a qualification – or whether it should be considered only to be a characteristic of a unit.

Levels

The first parameter defining the place in the framework is therefore *level*. Level is a measure of the degree of demand or difficulty. The implication of this is that a series of statements are required describing the nature of the demand on candidates for each level – these are the *level descriptors*. In practice, it is proving extremely difficult to write statements which are sufficiently distinctive and unambiguous at each level so that they can be used by those developing units and qualifications. The distinction between one level and another in a 12-level framework is often subtle and open to interpretation – whereas designers and users need something which can give them an instant picture against which to compare a new unit and thus determine its level.

Work by SQA and our higher education colleagues on defining level descriptors is continuing and is being informed by the work being done on this in other countries such as New Zealand, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Namibia.

SCQF Points

The second parameter defining the place in the framework is a number of *SCQF points* which a unit attracts. The SCQF points are allocated on the basis of the designed learning time required to achieve the unit. The formula is 1 SCQF point for every 10 hours of designed learning time. The number of points will therefore range from a small number for an individual unit or module through to several hundred on various levels for a complete Honours degree. Readers will note that the SCQF points give only a measure of volume – they do not take account of the grade of a qualification achieved; discussions are taking place now on whether grading should be accommodated in the points system.

The allocation of points does not constrain people in the way in which the unit or qualification is achieved. The points relate to the learning time for which the unit or qualification was *designed* – not the learning time *actually needed* when the individual completed it. Also, readers should remember that these are achievement (or output) points – they are not a guarantee of credit (or input) to a new unit or qualification. Generally, the decision on whether a person can receive credit towards a new unit or qualification will depend on the nature of those already held and on the nature of the outcomes of the new unit or qualification.

Design Rules for Qualifications

Overall, the combination of level and SCQF points does give an instant picture of the demand and amount of learning required for accumulation of units towards a qualification. Qualifications will usually be defined according to design rules which specify how many SCQF points are required at each of specified levels – for key national qualifications, all will require the same credit profile although the exact nature of the units involved will vary from subject to subject.

Thus for example, an HND might be defined as

- Level 6 – 20 SCQF points maximum
- Level 7 – 100 SCQF points minimum
- Level 8 - 100 SCQF points minimum
- Level 9 – 20 SCQF points maximum

(The profile allows for some flexibility for introductory units or extension units but is centred firmly around levels 7 and 8)

The HND has further tight design rules which ensure that all HNDs are broadly comparable – for example:

- 40% of the credits must be mandatory or of restricted choice and closely related to the HND's title
- the credits must involve a minimum of 40 at level 7 and 40 at level 8 for integrative projects which are externally marked or mandatorily moderated
- all candidates must achieve an output core skills profile at level 5

Key national qualification titles have such tightly specified credit and design rules because they are expected by the public to be broadly comparable from subject to subject – examples of such titles are *Honours Degree*, *HND* etc. Other qualifications can adopt a more flexible approach where the only criterion is fitness for purpose – these might, for example, adopt the general title *Certificate in ...…*

The workplace SVQs are not specified in quite the same way – in a sense, they are several steps behind in terms of the reform process. SVQ units are not yet able to be assigned a level or SCQF points because the National Training Organisations have not designed them to accommodate these features. At the moment, therefore, only whole SVQs are assigned levels and points on the basis of a set of very rough-and-ready assumptions about design length. This pragmatic approach was taken because it would not have been acceptable politically for these qualifications to have been excluded from SCQF. Much more work needs done – and the National Training Organisations need persuaded to do it – before SVQs are fully compatible with all aspects of SCQF.

Many university degrees are in a similar position and will have to be redeveloped to meet SCQF requirements and to comply with the new quality assurance and subject benchmarking system being introduced by the Quality Assurance Agency.

There is therefore much work to be done to fully integrate all Scottish qualifications fully into the SCQF system.

A further issue which the development partners must address is how to deal with qualifications achieved outwith the accountability of the Scottish system. Thus, for example, would a Scottish student who achieves an English qualification such as an A-level be allocated SCQF points? The current thinking is that a qualification can only be a full member of the SCQF system if the accountability for the standards in that qualification rests with the Scottish government. Thus English qualifications such as A-levels and NVQs, and other qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate, would not be accommodated directly in the SCQF.

It might however be possible to build up a database of equivalence between the Scottish framework and other national frameworks so that decisions on credit transfer could be taken consistently. Thus, for example, the student

mentioned above might be able to use his or her A-level as a substitute for SCQF points towards certain qualifications. The aim here would be to create alignments between the SCQF and other national frameworks so that such credit substitution might be possible. Such an approach would ensure that cross-border movement does not lead to disadvantage for individuals – but also ensures that national qualifications frameworks remain firmly linked to national accountability mechanisms.

Scottish Qualifications Authority assists the National Access Consortium Western Cape (NACWC) Pilot Project in Technical Colleges and Private Providers

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), in co-operation with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), made it possible for two trainers to be sent to the Western Cape during 1998 to provide intensive training in assessment in an outcomes-based system, for lecturers from the technical colleges and private providers involved in the NACWC pilot project. The project is investigating issues of implementation of the NQF system at provider level. The first phase of the training session took place in August 1998 and a follow-up workshop focussing on external verification of assessment was held in October 1998.

The SQA made available Ms Sheena Sim, a systems verifier with expertise in mathematics, and Ms Ann Morgan-Thomas, an internal verifier and language communication expert. The SQA trainers visited various campuses of providers in the pilot project to see the context within which lecturers are working. In this way they were able to offer on site advice and guidance.

Ms Sim and Ms Morgan-Thomas have vast experience, having both worked for colleges as well as with the SQA. Their experiences made it possible for them to identify immediately with the problems that the lecturers were experiencing, since they themselves have been in similar situations. The two trainers complemented each other well, with expertise in different subject areas and having worked in both internal and external verification sections of the SQA, over and above being systems verifiers.

Since the NACWC felt that the expertise and the experience of the SQA trainers could be profitably shared with others, members of the provincial education departments were also invited to the training sessions. The Department of Education: National Examinations attended the second training session. SAQA was also represented at both training sessions by Ms Sebolelo Mokhobo-Nomvete.

It was apparent to all participants that the two trainers had put in an enormous amount of effort into the preparation for the training workshops. They brought computer disks, training manuals and other documents with them and demonstrated their generosity and commitment to the project by leaving vast quantities of material behind, to be utilised in outcomes-based assessment training.

The intention of the August workshop was to equip lecturers with skills in the design and administration of appropriate assessment instruments, to prepare them to engage with the complex issues around outcomes-based assessment and measurement of competence. After the workshop, the trainers emphasised the following three issues, as matters for consideration in taking the project forward:

- The unit standards should be revised to ensure that they are accessible to those who use them and to ensure that the critical outcomes are given adequate attention;
- The issue of how evidence of assessment is provided and documented must be addressed;
- The importance of using enthusiastic lecturers in a pilot project is essential as these people can be groomed as role-models and mentors for others.

Some of the lessons that emerged for participants were:

- Careful record-keeping is essential in assuring the quality of assessment;
- Lecturers need to be well organised to ensure that learning material is separated from assessment material;
- Lecturers need to share good practice and fresh ideas;
- Lecturers must guard against over-assessing students;
- Lecturers must make use of re-assessment, identifying specific times for it , and ensure that there is a process of remediation for the learner between assessment opportunities;
- Lecturers should receive constant training in developing more innovative and creative instruments of assessment – if not, there is the danger of reliance on old test materials;

Participants indicated that the external verification training was extremely valuable, giving them good insight into the quality management cycle and enabling them to identify and address difficulties.

This article was compiled from reports of Joy Papier of NACWC. Ms Mokhobo-Nomvete is the SAQA correspondent with NACWC in respect of this pilot project. She can be contacted at 012-3469109.

Qualifications Authorities' Forging International Links
By Joe Samuels

Introduction

Reading the commercial press and listening to the popular discourse of the detractors of outcomes-based education and training in South Africa, the perception is created that this country is completely out of step with the rest of the world in developing and implementing an outcomes-based education and training system.

In February 1999, I had the privilege of attending a workshop on international benchmarking initiated by the Council for Normalization and Certification of Competency Standards (CONOCER), based in Mexico, which was aimed at forging links between six qualifications authorities involved in outcomes-based education and training in their respective countries[1]. In addition to those participating countries, at least six other countries are in the process of setting up similar structures and are considering joining this important initiative. South Africa is thus part of an international trend where qualifications authorities and outcomes-based education are clearly on the education and training agenda.

The primary intention of this initiative is to forge links between similar organizations across the globe and to benchmark what is happening in the different countries. Because of the comparative newness of the initiatives there are relatively few benchmarking projects. It is hence crucial for South Africa and the South African Qualifications Authority to participate in the process. Some reasons include:

- keeping up-to-date with what is happening in the international arena;
- developing links and partnerships between similar organizations, given the globalization of education and training especially in respect of private offshore institutions.;
- comparing our standards and qualifications with those of other countries;
- learning from international experience, good policy and practice.

In this report, I will give a short background to the international benchmarking project, agreed upon by the participating countries, outline the key decisions and reflect on some of the lessons learnt from the workshop experience, as well as the visit to Mexico.

Background

The Mexican organization CONOCER has been in contact with British qualification organizations for a considerable period of time with the aim of initiating an international benchmarking process or project. The participating organizations at that stage included CONOCER from Mexico, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Australian National Training Authorities (ANTA). The initial idea was that this project would be electronically based and electronically driven. In order to fast track the process, CONOCER called a face-to-face meeting and invitations were extended to SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) and NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority).

A first draft of the Terms of Reference was drawn up, with the main contributions being made by the organizations that were initially involved in process. This group had started with workplace competency-based models and is presently still working within this area. However some members of the group are looking at the idea of a more inclusive framework. The international benchmarking exercise is thus located primarily in the realm of competency-based models within industry. With this as a starting point, there are real possibilities for expanding the focus of the project after the initial report has been released at the end of December 1999. The point was also made that the project could expand in the future, to enable specialization networks to be formed and developed.

The Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to define a series of indicators that could be utilized as a theoretical framework for comparing best practices in the processes of competency-based standards setting, training, assessment and certification.

One outcome of the project will be the publication of two documents. The first document will contain a comparison between the qualifications authority models operating in the different countries. A common set of indicators were agreed upon which each country had to complete by 30 March 1999. CONOCER took the responsibility to write a composite document by the end of June 1999.

The second document will compare competency-based standards setting, assessment and certification in each of the participating countries, with particular reference to industry. Indicators were agreed to at the workshop and each country was obligated to provide their information in accordance with the criteria by the end of June 1999. The integrated document will be put together by CONOCER by the end of December 1999.

Participating Persons and Institutions

The following individuals and the institutions to which they belong, participated in the workshop:

- Maida Grant - Scottish Qualifications Authority, (SQA) (Glasgow, Scotland)
- David Handley - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, (QCA) (London, England)
- Andre Lewis - Australian National Training Authority, (ANTA) (Brisbane, Australia)
- Joe Samuels - South African Qualifications Authority, (SAQA) (Pretoria, South Africa)
- Iker de Luisa and Carlos Janowitz Council for Normalization and Certification of Competency Standards, CONOCER (Mexico City, Mexico).
- Apologies were received from New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) (joined the project after the workshop) and the USA National Skill Standards Board .

Debates

Scope of project: What should the focus of the project be? Should the project focus on industry competency standards or should it focus on other parts of the framework as well? In other words, should the project be inclusive? Most of the participants in the project indicated that in their countries there are dual frameworks, excluding schooling and higher education, or they have started with their focus on vocational education and training, and are now moving towards a broader framework. Some countries, for both theoretical and political reasons, argued strongly for an industry focus. Mexico, that is driving the process, is under pressure to show that the competency

model is working from a cost-benefit point of view. The reason for this is that the Mexican government made a loan to set up their national framework.

The group decided that this project is about benchmarking the models, as a whole, in the participating countries and to focus the project on the qualifications systems and competency standards of industry within a six-month timeframe. The door has been left open for further development of the project. Countries were also encouraged to develop bi- or trilaterals in areas of common concern and interest.

Inclusion/exclusion: Who should be included in the project and by when? The initial thinking and agreement was that a small group should start the project and at a later date include other countries. The reason for this decision was to start the project immediately with countries that have some experience in the implementation of qualifications frameworks. There was also concern about the different needs of individual countries that might be too diverse to enable coherent comparison and discussion. The group agreed that participating countries should keep the countries with whom they have contact, in the loop regarding the progress of the project with view to developing a larger network. It was decided to include other countries after the first phase of the project is completed in December 1999 for the reasons outlined above.

Discussions and Links with other countries

1. England

Discussions were held with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority around monitoring and developing common strategies to address issues surrounding English institutions offering "internationally accredited qualifications" and who wish to enter the South African scenario. There was concensus that the two organisations should explore the idea of establishing Authority to Authority relationships, with a view to recognising credible institutions and developing common approaches to 'fly-by-nights' and bogus institutions. There was discussion around the lastest developments in each country, including an exchange of documents. Of particular interest was the discussion around the debates about level descriptors in England.

2. Australia

Meetings with the Australian National Training Authority were held to deepen understanding about the latest developments in Australia. Documents about ANTA and its work are available from the SAQA Resource Centre.

3. Scotland

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and SAQA have already developed a strong relationship, with staff exchanges having taken place between SQA and SAQA over the last two years. However, it was useful to discuss financial models, given the fact that SQA is about 90% self-sufficient.

4. Mexico

CONOCER is an organization set up by the Mexican Government consisting of mainly the Ministeries of Labour and Education. The Council of CONOCER consists of six representatives from each of the following: government (ministers), business and labour and is chaired by the Minister of Labour. CONOCER is responsible for overseeing and implementation of compentency standards, certification, quality assurance and assessment.

The standards setting is led by 44 Lead bodies which generate the competency standards. The framework has five levels. Functional analysis is used to develop maps for standards. There is no credit system and the units are not assigned to specific levels. However, qualifications are assigned to levels. A survey of basic skills was conducted and a basic set of skills has been developed and is used in standards setting. A new initiative in Mexico is the development of second generation competency standards which include embedded knowledge and attitudes. The initiative is new because Mexico used the national vocational qualifications as a basis for their first round of

standards setting. Some of these 'new' standards are now available at SAQA in English through the translation of the SA Embassy in Mexico.

Awarding bodies provide certification. Assessment centres are places of provision and assessment. CONOCER is working towards ISO 9000 certification as a quality system. It also participates in the national Mexican quality award. Awarding bodies are expected to become ISO 9000 compliant. CONOCER audits awarding bodies and assessment centres.

CONOCER has three divisions: Standards Setting (normalization), Certification and Planning. Planning includes training, developing and maintaining international relationships, research, information systems and administration. CONOCER has 150 staff members and the worksystem is a project management-based system. This means that people are contracted to attain specific goals or outcomes within specified timeframes.

CONOCER also has established links with a number of Latin American countries which are moving towards competency-based standards in education and training.

All the documents collected during the trip to Mexico are available in the SAQA Resource Centre.

Possibilities for exchange and linkage

The issue of information and experience exchange between SAQA and CONOCER is important for two reasons. The Mexican reality has similarites with South Africa in that it is a country of huge disparaties in wealth, employment opportunities, and education and training experiences. There seems to be a social contract between government, (labour and education), organised business and organised labour.The Mexican experience is also likely to inform our deliberations inrespect of the questions of scale, given the fact that they have a population of 98 million people.

SAQA staff will be able to learn from the Mexican experience in addressing and dealing with competency-based standards and certification, especially their approach to the standard setting and quality assurance processes. They are currently reflecting on their own practice and are exploring notions of second generation standards which include the concepts of embedded knowledge, basic (key skills) and attitudes. SAQA staff would benefit enormously from the sharing of those experiences.

CONOCER is interested in the Authority as an organizational form. They are also interested in establishing formal links with the South African Departments of Education and Labour.

CONOCER is also the gateway to the other Latin American countries involved in competency standards, and again, the similarities with the South African reality are clear.

Since Spanish is the pre-dominant language of communication, with very little of their material available in English, communication as a result of language differences could pose a problem. A further problem is the distance, travel costs and funding possibilities.

Conclusion

Interacting with comparable organizations which are trying to deal with similar questions and trends has been enriching. SAQA is committed to participating in this International Benchmarking Project around the different models operating in their respective countries. Benchmarking standards setting and quality assurance processes for competency models in industry is the starting point for further collaboration. The next stage may include benchmarking specific areas of learning which are relevant and appropriate for the participating countries.

[1] The participating countries are: Mexico, Australia, England, Scotland and South Africa. The United States and New Zealand received invitations but did not attend the meeting. New Zealand subsequently joined the project.

FALLING INTO LOVE WITH THE NQF

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In this paper, I explore, albeit briefly and tentatively, one example of current education policy that rests squarely on communitarian assumptions: the National Qualification Framework.

The NQF and its governing body, SAQA, are an attempt to bind all education and training into an integrated system in which there are minimal barriers to mobility. This integration is to be governed by comprehensive and complex criteria of assessment that will establish the worth of a performance. This is often referred to as a "paradigm shift" from an in-put content based curriculum to an out-put competence based curriculum [1].

For the NQF, it does not matter how you achieve a certain set (unit standard) of knowledge, skills and values. As long as you can perform a specified task competently (demonstrating that you "have" the required knowledge, skills and values) then you can be given credit and awarded a certificate. The process (in-put) is no longer to be specified (hence the importance of the "Recognition of Prior Learning"), what matters is the evaluated performance.

There are three theoretical concepts that are central to the NQF: outcome, performance, and competence. Assessment, or evaluation, for the NQF rests on the concept of an outcome. The NQF interprets outcomes as taking place in two dimensions: competence and performance [2]. Performance is an observable activity that can be measured and is associated with training, "manual skills" and instrumentalism [3]. Increasingly, performances are linked to the market - their primary value is their exchange value. In contrast, competence, the second form of assessment, looks towards the inner being/disposition/soul of the performer. The inference is not to the market, but to the hidden inner nature of a human being. Not surprisingly, competence is associated with education, the mental (or cognitive), the spiritual/sacred and with rationalism.

To its credit, the NQF attempts to bind together performance (manual) and competence (mental). To see them not as in contradiction or dichotomy, but as two poles of a continuum. Given apartheid non-education, integration has a strong appeal. There is, too, a strong global trend towards integration. These attempts have come under stringent criticism. Too often, it is claimed, the market overwhelms the sacred: competence is collapsed into observable performances; education into training [4]. Knowledge becomes commodified and, universities become fee-seeking learning organisations (their sacred disciplined mission discarded as outdated – along with the rest of our old "struggle icons").

The pragmatic habit of turning contradictions into continuums has become fashionable in South Africa since 1990. A continuum implies the suspension, displacement or deferment of dialectic, of conflicts and contradictions. I think this is an example of an instrumentalist and, in some strains, a postmodernist, sleight of hand. A false belief that changing the language is sufficient to change the world beyond language. What goes missing is the subject and her positioning and orientation on the continuum. If we (re)introduce the subject then the tensions (re)emerge. A continuum does have two poles and unless we can assume the position of an omniscient observer, we are positioned on the continuum. This positioning includes our orientation - which way are we facing? Are we oriented towards rationalism, or instrumentalism, or do we adopt a Janus-faced pragmatism?

From the position, or point of view, of a university the most favourable interpretations of the NQF are those linked to pragmatism. So, for example, a continuum of mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge generates choices. An over emphasis on mode 2 knowledge, on observable valuable outcomes, will starve mode 1 - a withering of the rational disciplinary base on which mode 2 is dependent. The danger is that an absence of disciplinary knowledge will

undermine the university's ability to produce new knowledge thereby blunting our competitive edge in the new information and knowledge markets. Given our present circumstances, an overemphasis on mode 1 knowledge will create a severe funding crisis - once again undermining the university's viability.

Aristotle was an exponent of continuums and his "golden mean" remains a clear example. He (via Dewey and Ryle) is also the source of a typology that captures pragmatism rather neatly:

thinking	theory	contemplation	rational	explicit
doing	practice	habit	Instrumental	tacit
making	Production	skill	Artefactual	creative

This typology captures the key concepts of a pragmatist epistemology. For the pragmatist, we should not attempt to choose between thinking and doing but, rather, find a balance between the two. The golden mean will make us productive and skilled. It is this integrative aspect of pragmatism that makes it so suitable as the underlying epistemology of the NQF that becomes a symbolic embodiment of the RDP: through an integrated system of human resource development we can make a "new" South Africa. On what is this making based? (Or, how do we bake a rainbow cake?). We must integrate thinking and doing, competence and performance to produce/create multivalent outcomes.

To use NQF-speak, integration is made possible through a generic competence: inference. Inference is a cognitive competence (reason) and an affective (love) competence. At a conceptual (cognitive) level, inference enables us to establish patterns of implication, to translate from one theory or language to another - it is at the heart of our web of belief. At a social or personal (affective) level, inference makes solidarity and reciprocal intimacy possible. Inference is what enables us to engage in what Hannah Arendt called "representative thinking" where we are able to adopt the viewpoint of a concrete other - laying the basis for mutual recognition.

Inference, then, is a generic skill that may be necessary for the construction of theories and for the construction of a community. For the pragmatist, there is a strong connection between theory and community which leads to a catch 22 or what Habermas calls a "performative contradiction". To construct a theory, to speak a language, to discursively infer, my self has to have developed within a community of (m)others (cf. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development).

As Wittgenstein demonstrated so clearly in showing the impossibility of a private language, community is what makes inference possible. It is our participation in rule-governed activities that enable us to use rules. So too we learn to infer by inferring within a community of inferrers. To be outside a language game is not to understand the rules of the game, the patterns of inference. Or, in a more local language, associated with Ubuntu: "A person is a person by means of other people".

Pragmatism makes an assumption that is common to social/community orientations. Hegel's civil society, Marx's communist society, Habermas' discourse ethics, are all characterised by a belief in the possibility, or inevitability, of unity and perfection: a society in which people, differences, are bonded together into a sacred other - a union of love. Hence, the title - there is a link between the NQF and love - they both assume the possibility of an integration between differences based on the possibility of inference within a social (con)text.

It is this assumption which exposes the soft underbelly of pragmatism. To practise pragmatism assumes that I am already in a pragmatic society. To practise reciprocal intimacy requires a society/community in which reciprocal love is practised. So too with the NQF, it tends to assume as already existing what it is intended to produce.

Within education, curriculum construction takes place within "structured learning environments" which are mediated by texts and bodies. The NQF talks about a head (knowledge), hands (skills) and heart (values) approach. This, however, ignores the way these parts are integrated (mediated) by a body. Humans are inferential mediators (or infer(e)n(t)al machines?). For a university, the greatest danger is that the market will increasingly dominate

knowledge. Competence will collapse into a market determined observable performance and outcomes will become instrumental and one-dimensional. The university will become "human capital factories" in which the Socratic grove rapidly withers. Although this is a likely consequence of the NQF, it is not necessary. There is no necessity about pragmatism collapsing into instrumentalism, just as there is no guarantee that communities will be either virtuous or vicious.

The kind of pragmatic, cognitive and affective integration assumed by the NQF, or the social integration assumed by the RDP, can only take root in a "sea of love". I use love here to indicate a utopia in which the bonds between people are harmonious, just, reciprocal, peaceful, and tolerant. Falling into love has a Heidegerian resonance of being "thrown into the world". Jessica

Benjamin's "Bonds of Love" suggests that most people are born into their Mother's love – Love is the first bond (and the deepest cut?). Shortly thereafter, mother dominates her children as she trains them into obedience. The paradox is that domination and obedience emerge from a bond of love and an awareness of an autonomous self is tied to a relation of dependence on the (m)other. A dependence that breeds love and fear. The privileging of the common weal (branded on the bodies of its citizens)[5] over the interest of the individual may produce a loving community, but it is just as likely to produce a dominating and fear filled society of dependants. With instrumentalism rampant and a market economy that extols wealth, the latter becomes a strong possibility. Our primary identity, inscribed on our bodies from birth, becomes a means for profit and economic growth. Our rationality is displaced by the irrationality of the market, pragmatism becomes instrumentalist and we become one-dimensional performers [6].

For Benjamin, the best escape from the dominating effects of dependency is through the erotic. A reciprocal love relation enables a mutual orgasm in which the attunement between one self and an other enables the self to lose consciousness but not awareness. This erotic epiphany is an act of transcendence: we rise above the fragmentation of the everyday into a "sacred" union. The erotic is not the only way to make a union between mental and manual, rational and instrumental; different processes can produce similar outcomes. What is common, however, to all the kinds of utopian unities I mentioned earlier is that integration requires some form of transcendence, enlightenment, epiphany, a withering of the state and false consciousness, a "falling into love" or an NQF paradigm shift.

An NQF that avoids intrumentalism and implements pragmatic and utopian assumptions privileging integrative and communitarian impulses and the importance of transcendence will give special importance to a place where versities are unified. In an ideal university, the discourse of a Socratic grove is virtual. It is free from conflict - which requires a community of people who engage in reciprocal recognition (Benhabib, 1986: 320). To achieve this virtuous/virtual space requires three kinds of cognitive competence: logical semantic (for consistency), procedural (for regulation) and processual (for know-how). In addition it requires affective competences: mutual recognition and altruistic reciprocity (love). In this picture, universities are virtual realities, places of transcendence. We may worship different gods in our Socratic grove, but we value the love of wisdom and the other.

In order, however, for a pragmatic NQF to support a liberating and productive project it needs to take subjects, bodies and the erotic or sacred far more seriously, otherwise the spectres of irrationality and instrumentalism will continue to undermine its benevolent assumptions. It is through a valuation of the body, its competences and dispositions, that we can nurture transcendence (of the erotic, sacred, et al.).

Within a pragmatic NQF, universities would have to re-orientate themselves towards the market, without losing their source of transcendence: a productive virtuous virtual discursive and erotic or sacred community. In a society fractured by violence, fear and domination, the assumption of a pragmatic and utopian virtual community is very problematic. It requires an act of transcendence, a "leap of faith", that literally "makes no sense". Universities are a crucial arena within the NQF. They stand the best chance of combining rationalism and instrumentalism into pragmatism; of integrating the sacred and the profane, the erotic and narcissistic, into a mediating unity. To avoid a collapse into instrumentalism, universities could embrace the communitarian assumptions of the NQF and complement these with an alternative orientation towards our bodies or selves, thus achieving a balance or golden mean. The most suitable alternative may well lie in a human rights culture with its strong privileging of the individual. In addition, the rather formal juridical nature of human rights may need to be complemented by a celebration of the erotic - an exploration of our bodies as more than just economic instruments. Without a transcendental project, a paradigm shift or leap of faith, the NQF could become a tool of domination and fear.

NOTES

1. Given that this is a radical shift, the likelihood of incommensurability between the paradigms is strong. If they are incommensurable, it is not possible to "make the shift" by being rational. The "How" of change between incommensurable paradigms can not be a process of rationally translating from one to the other. Those documents that offer prescriptions, or norms and standards, to govern change are misleading.
2. This interpretation of outcomes owes much to Cass Lubisi.
3. Taylor says this of instrumentalism: "The instrumental stance involves us objectifying...or neutralising ...nature...(W)e declare our separation from it... (it) allows for no deeper unity in society than that of sharing certain common instruments." (1989: 383)
4. Criticisms of instrumentalism originate in diverse sources including: the Franfurt school (eg. Marcuse's one-dimensional man), Lyotards' performativity and Taylor's "malaises of the modern West". In this paper, I configure these criticisms around the notion that instrumentalism is "irrational" and relies on means-ends relations which ignore the subject. The focus is not on (wo)men, but on means. Within education, Bernstein (1995) provides a useful critique.
5. Foucault (1976) explores the importance of "inscribed bodies".
6. The tacit inference here is that competences (such as "being rational" or "being erotic") are esoteric dispositions or orientations. Furthermore, they can only be acquired via intersubjective interaction. Hence, the esoteric can only be realised (become an outcome) via a community: the esoteric emerges from the erotic.

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Members of SAQA: appointed from 1 December 1999

CHAIRPERSON: Appointed by the Minister in terms of Section 4 (2) of the he South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995):

Dr M. Nkomo, President of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

MEMBERS: (Nominated by constituencies in accordance with the provisions as stipulated in *Section 4(3)(a-p)* of the *South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995)*:

Nominee	Constituency
Mr D.Adler	Discretionary appointment.
Ms A. Bird	Director General : Labour
Dr A. Dippenaar	National organisations representing organised business

Mr D. George	National organisations representing organised labour
Prof. W. Gevers	Committee of University Principles (Now: South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association
Ms G. Henning	National organisations representing organised business
Prof. N. Kok	Committee of Technikon Principals
Mr M. J. Komana	National body representing teachers' college rectors
Dr P Lolwana	Discretionary appointment
Ms C. Marock	National organisations representing organised labour
Mr A. Matlole	The organised teaching profession
Ms S. Matsebula	National organisations representing the special education needs sector
Mr K. Mockler	Discretionary appointment
Mr M. Mokgatle	National organisations representing colleges other than teachers' colleges and technical colleges
Mr S. Morotoba	National Training Board (Now: National Skills Authority)
* Ms A. Oberholzer	The organised teaching profession
Mr B. P. O'Connell,	Heads of Provincial Education Departments
Ms R. Omar	Distance Education sector
Mr S. Ori	National organisations representing lecturers and trainers
Dr I. L. Rensburg	Director General (Education)
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Mr S. Xulu	Discretionary appointment
Mr M. Zibi	National organisations representing the adult basic education and training sector
Ms O. Zungu	National organisations representing the early childhood development sector

* Ms Oberholzer joined the staff of SAQA on 1 December 1999 and was replaced on the Authority by Ms S Müller.

EX OFFICIO MEMBER: Mr S. B. A Isaacs, Executive Officer: SAQA

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