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# THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

## SAQA BULLETIN

Volume 16 Number 1

November 2016

*Qualifications Frameworks:  
 Lessons, Reflections, Priorities for the Future*





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**SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

POSTNET SUITE 248

PRIVATE BAG X06

WATERKLOOF

0145

FACSIMILE: +27 (0)12 431 5039

WEBSITE: [www.saqqa.org.za](http://www.saqqa.org.za)

HELPDESK: 086 010 3188

E-MAIL: [saqainfo@saqqa.org.za](mailto:saqainfo@saqqa.org.za)

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## Foreword

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This special bulletin is an integral part of the 20 year anniversary celebrations of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The bulletin captures the debates and discussions of the International Seminar on Qualifications Frameworks (ISQFs) that was held on 20 May 2016 at the Table Bay Hotel, Cape Town. The ISQFs intended to reflect on the key lessons learnt over the 20 years of the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa and internationally. It also intended to begin to project how we can conceptualise a road map for the qualifications framework movement for the next 20 years drawing on the lessons of the past but taking into account the context of the world today and tomorrow. It was also important to place QFs in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted by the United Nations and to explore how QFs could contribute to the overall achievement of the SDGs and in particular SDG 4 that specifically focuses on providing quality education. We could summarise the deliberations and outcome of the seminar with the four words that crystallised two decades of QF implementation and the way forward for the next twenty years as ‘implement, stabilise, consolidate and advance!’

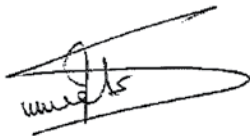
In order to achieve these objectives for the ISQFs seminar SAQA invited 18 experts on Qualifications Frameworks from around the world including the African Union, SADC, UNESCO, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, etc, to help us to reflect on the last 20 years and to project what the future of QFs could hold over the next twenty years. In addition we also invited members of QFs and Qualifications Authorities from across the world and from counterpart bodies on the African continent. We deliberately wanted to keep the numbers small and wanted people with experience on the ground and experts who would give it their best shot at what a future road map might look like. In the end about 50 people attended this seminar and contributed enormously to the success of the event.

In keeping with the aims of the event, the first set of papers presented focussed on sharing information around QF developments, and the lessons learned to date. The second set located QFs in the global arena, and considered ways of measuring the impact of QFs. The final group of papers focussed on forward-looking sectoral, national, and regional QFs.

We believe it is important to share the valuable lessons of the past twenty years of QF development with a much broader audience to engage with the ideas expressed at the seminar. We also believe that by engaging the ideas of how QFs can develop and can be successfully implemented this bulletin can make an outstanding contribution to QF development over the next fifteen to twenty years as one of the seminal texts of this vital period. I therefore urge you to read the papers carefully, let us learn from our mistakes and let us not repeat them so that we can truly make QFs workable for the many people in our countries that rely on them as instruments of recognition, mobility and progression. We are looking forward to your active engagement with the ideas in this publication.

A special thanks to Borhene Chakroun and UNESCO, for making it possible for the international experts to travel to South Africa. Thank you to all contributors and presenters for their contributions to the seminar. Thank you to the SAQA team – you you have been wonderful – especially the International Liaison Directorate. Thank you to the Research Directorate for their work in pulling the bulletin together.

Let us go to implement, stabilise, consolidate and advance!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Samuels', enclosed within a stylized, elongated oval shape.

**Joe Samuels**

Chief Executive Officer

South African Qualifications Authority

**QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS:  
REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST 20 YEARS**



# Qualifications Frameworks: Lessons from the Past 20 Years – an International Perspective

*Dr Madhu Singh and Mr Arjen Deij*

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## INTRODUCTION

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) are an important development in education and training reforms in developed, transitioning and developing countries. A recent United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) desktop search shows that today 154 countries and territories are developing NQFs. Their number seems to have reached a saturation point, with developments deepening within some countries and not much progress happening in other countries.

Recently, few new countries have joined the world-wide trend towards Qualifications Frameworks (QFs). It seems likely that the number of countries that will be able to establish a functioning NQF might be lower than those which have planned one today. But NQFs will remain very important tools to support education, training and lifelong learning internationally as they are likely to increase their importance as tools for international labour mobility.

Before 2000, only a small number of countries – New Zealand, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, France and South Africa – had NQFs. These first frameworks were developed to address specific challenges for linking, regulating or developing new qualifications. The number of QFs has grown exponentially through the development of regional qualifications frameworks. The origins of these regional frameworks are strongly linked to the economic integration processes of world regions, creating transnational, even global frameworks of qualifications. This trend was first described by Ron Tuck in 2007. Tuck distinguishes between first generation, second generation and third generation QFs.

**Table 1: Different generations of qualifications frameworks (Source: Tuck, 2007)**

1 <sup>st</sup> Generation QFs	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation QFs	3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation QFs
Developed on the basis of national perceptions, mainly determined by internal drivers, and often using experimental approaches	Tried to learn from 1 <sup>st</sup> generation experiences for design and processes. Seeking more communication with other NQFs bilaterally. Influence of external drivers limited	Internal drivers remain important, but external drivers have a significant impact on the technical design of frameworks and quality assurance (QA) arrangements

In 2016, discussion is no longer about the frameworks that existed during the early phase. The majority of countries that are developing or implementing QFs are no longer high-income Anglo-Saxon countries, but developing and middle-income countries with different contexts and cultural traditions. However, there are some common characteristics that are still key, such as the emphasis on learning outcomes and the possibility of alternative pathways to qualifications.

NQFs are now a part of a wider search for international solutions in education and training. They are also an attempt to support mobility at a time when economies are increasingly integrated, and services are becoming more unified, and labour migrates across borders.

While some NQFs, established more than 20 years ago, are viewed as being comprehensive and established QFs, they continue to change and are going through processes of development and implementation to a next generation of more strengthened and mature frameworks (Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa), the fourth generation of QFs<sup>1</sup>.

In order to analyse how this has happened, an attempt is made to identify some milestones shaping QFs. The paper goes on to identify what has made QFs so significant in developing and transitioning countries, and emerging economies. Then, the paper spells out some lessons learned over the past 20 years, in other words, it examines

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<sup>1</sup> The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is expected to join this group of reviewed strengthened frameworks as it is currently being reviewed, emerging as an updated regional framework, in which most countries have already referenced their NQFs to the EQF.

some of the factors necessary for QFs to be realised. The paper concentrates on recent QFs in developing and transitioning countries covered in the joint United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) – European Training Foundation (ETF), European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2015) and the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (GINRQFs). Most developing and transitioning countries reported in this Inventory have developed or are in the process of developing, comprehensive QFs that cover all types and levels of qualifications, or have arrived at some kind of overall structure for their frameworks.

The vast majority of the countries consider sub-frameworks, either in Higher Education, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, or labour competency frameworks as the most appropriate way to begin the implementation of NQFs. Thailand, for example, started with a Higher Education QF and is now progressing towards an overarching NQF that incorporates a TVET sub-framework. There is a trend for NQFs to rely on sector initiatives. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) now includes three NQF Sub-Frameworks but is inclusive in that it accommodates differences<sup>2</sup>.

An analysis of the reasons given by these countries for developing QFs is similar to those given in other countries. The reasons include increasing the demand-orientation of education and training; increasing access, transfer and progression; increasing coherence and coordination between different sub-systems of educational systems and between different sectors; enhancing the quality of learning and skills development; greater recognition of skills and learning; increasing the mobility of learners and workers, and the international recognition and alignment of qualifications; improving the employability of workers, the productivity of enterprises and inclusive economic growth; and enhancing opportunities for lifelong learning.

The rationale for establishing QFs as reflected in national policy objectives is a product of different contextual and historical factors. The national policy objectives are products of different education and training systems, institutional forms of governance, different concepts and principles related to lifelong learning, learning outcomes and the recognition

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<sup>2</sup> The South African NQF comprises the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) – each overseen by a Quality Council. SAQA is responsible *inter-alia* for the coordination of the Sub-Frameworks and the implementation and further development of the NQF.

of learning. These concepts are contested and some authors on the subject prefer to refer to the impact of QFs as being ‘formative’ rather than fixed (Coles *et al* 2014).

## **MILESTONES SHAPING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

It is useful to highlight some milestones that have shaped QF developments. The roots of QFs go back to before the establishment of SAQA so that it is possible to speak about QFs over the past thirty years. The term ‘qualifications framework’ dates back to 1986 with the De Ville Review of Vocational Qualifications in the UK, where it was used to describe a new framework for national vocational qualifications. The idea of levels for qualifications, rather than comparisons of educational programmes, had already been around for some time.

### ***The desire to compare and link qualifications by levels***

In the Soviet Union in 1968, a single tariff qualification handbook was adopted, thereby introducing a consistent approach to ‘levelling qualifications’ based on the qualification characteristics of occupations. All occupations and job titles were regulated in the Soviet Union, and for most, qualification characteristics were defined in many ways very similarly to learning outcome statements. These characteristics were used as the basis for educational standards. People who graduated from Vocational and Higher Education received diplomas that mentioned not only the programmes they had completed but also their qualifications, i.e. the occupations or professions concerned. Levels (*razryady*) were allocated, thereby establishing the basis for salaries and working conditions. There were eight levels, with higher-qualified workers classified using Levels 5 - 8.

In France, a five-level nomenclature was adopted in 1969 to classify qualifications. These levels were used by the national technical committee that came into force in 1971 to deal with the approval of vocational certificates (*Homologation des titres*). The levels also formed the basis for a social dialogue on wages and continuing training activities.

The French system was an important inspiration for the five SEDOC European levels for comparing vocational qualifications which the European Communities<sup>3</sup>, the

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3 European Economic Council (EEC) Decision (85/368/EEC) of 16 July 1985 on the comparability of vocational training qualifications between the Member States of the European Community.

predecessor of the European Union (EU), adopted in 1985. These levels represented: (1) those with compulsory education and able to perform simple tasks; (2) semi-skilled workers qualified to engage in a specific activity in initial vocational education and to act independently within limited contexts; (3) independent skilled workers with complete vocational education and training and possibly able also to lead their colleagues if needed; (4) technicians, and graduates from post-secondary vocational education ready to assume design and/or management and/or administrative responsibilities; and (5) the professional/master level obtained after completing higher training, and allowing persons to be autonomous in pursuing their careers as employees or self-employed people.

The idea of the SEDOC levels did not inspire the imagination of the European Member States, which did not develop their own systems in analogy, as did those developing the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) – if they had, perhaps there would not have been the important development of NQFs witnessed today. The perspectives of countries on qualifications structures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were predominantly national, sectoral, regional, and institutional.

### ***Learning outcomes as a key concept for ‘modern’ NQFs: Overcoming cultural differences***

Learning outcomes have had an important impact on how levels and qualification standards have been defined. They have allowed conceptual progression beyond institutional and political boundaries, and the comparison and linking of qualifications that are issued by different types of institutions. The concept of learning outcomes, developed together with the internationalisation of the discourse on qualifications, was mainly a discussion in the English language, dominated by Anglo-Saxons. Views of ‘qualifications frameworks’ have been very much influenced by the Anglo-Saxon literature on QFs, but it is important to take into account how this concept has evolved beyond English-speaking industrialised countries, in order to understand how QFs are developing today.

The role qualifications play as social and legal constructs based on common law is less formalised in the Anglo-Saxon culture than in many other parts of the world. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, qualifications systems were decentralised and the result of private initiatives and local actors, and conventions established through best practices. These practices needed to be brought into a more holistic and comprehensive framework

to allow for better comparison between qualifications. QFs were mainly seen as tools to bring a sense of order to these 'markets of qualifications', which characterized the organically developed qualification systems. The original frameworks that were developed in New Zealand, England, Scotland and Australia reflected mainly national solutions for linking up systems of qualifications.

The contexts in which QFs are implemented are very diverse, and as a consequence, the way NQFs operate in qualification systems differ. Some systems are formalised, dominated by well-established stakeholders and existing conventions. On the other end of the spectrum, there are countries with poorly developed formal education and training systems, countries emerging from post-conflict situations or newly independent countries where QFs are developed as a basis for their education and training systems. The NQFs as tools for classifying qualifications based on learning outcomes and levels of complexity are conceptually more similar today than they were originally (for example, the Australian Qualifications Framework did not have any explicit levels until 2010), but the set-up around the frameworks beyond their level descriptors makes them very different from one another.

In this article, the readers' attention is drawn to this diversity of settings and purposes in the development of QFs, and in particular to the role of NQFs in transitioning and developing countries.

Raffe (2011) described the international debate about NQFs as being between 'isomorphism' and 'convergence' versus 'national specificity' and 'path-dependence'. Indeed, work has started on 'world reference levels' (global level descriptors), to create a universal language between countries, and the EQF model has been particularly influential in shaping NQFs. Although the idea of an isomorphic unifier of qualification systems may be appealing to some while appalling to others, at the moment, the authors do not yet see a clear convergence towards a single global QF.

Every new generation of NQFs builds on the previous one. One observable milestone is the useful lens that first generation QFs have provided for the development of the second, third and now even the fourth generation QFs. They have provided test cases of the efficacy of different constructs.

## ***NQFs as tools to track and facilitate lifelong learning***

An important milestone can be said to be the concept of lifelong learning as an organising principle of education and training reforms in several countries. QFs can be seen as responses to developing increasingly flexible, integrated and interlinked systems of learning pathways, and the growing need to recognize learning and knowledge that has been achieved outside the formal education and training sector.

With UNESCO's Faure Report in 1972 and the Delors Report of 1997, lifelong learning became an explicit policy objective in many countries. But only the European Memorandum of Lifelong Learning in 2002 made indirect reference to QFs by calling for instruments that enable transparency around and of qualifications.

Towards the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 21<sup>st</sup>, Scotland, England, Wales, Northern Ireland and France established comprehensive frameworks, bringing together and consolidating existing developments in sub-sectors to create NQFs for lifelong learning.

The French QF builds on the existing five levels. It established a National Repertory of Professional Qualifications that includes all public vocational and Higher Education qualifications, and is also open to qualifications developed within sectors. A tripartite National Committee oversees the Repertory. The 2001 Law on Social Modernisation in France, which established the legal basis for the new arrangements, stipulates that all qualifications need to be developed with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in order to be integrated into the Repertory. Moreover, the Law stipulates that each qualification has to be obtainable through the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and provides for the rights of citizens to have their competences validated. The idea of the validation of non-formal and informal learning has always been an important motivation for developing QFs for lifelong learning, but France is one of the countries that has really succeeded in giving it a central place.

Scotland in turn has been a pioneer in developing the national Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as a sort of lifelong learning 'taximeter', although the notion that learners can claim rather than gain credit is still far from daily practice. In Europe, the concept of Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) systems did not gain much ground beyond Higher Education, where it has been an integral part of the

Erasmus Programme and the Bologna Process.

It is clear to the authors that in the years after 2000, lifelong learning has gained importance, and with it the idea of NQFs as tools to measure achievements in lifelong learning. These years also saw the start of the internationalisation, or better still, the globalisation of QFs. This trend is visible for example, in Ireland's National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) established in 2003. Ireland built on the lessons learned from its neighbours. It aimed at developing a framework through which all learning achievements could be measured and related to each other in a coherent way. It includes many different types and sizes of qualifications. The NFQ aims to be the framework of all recognized qualifications, and is therefore also a tool for quality assurance.

In 2004 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted its Recommendation<sup>195</sup> on Human Resources Development in which it recommended that Member States develop NQFs to facilitate lifelong learning, assist enterprises and employment agencies to match skills demand with supply, guide individuals in their choices of training and careers, and facilitate the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and previously acquired skills, competencies and experience. The same recommendation asked Member States to use NQFs to develop transparent mechanisms for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills, including prior learning and previous experience.

### ***The emergence of regional and transnational qualifications frameworks***

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), a Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation was established in 1997. It published a SADC QF Concept Document in March 2005, which proposed a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) consisting of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology. It is intended that the RQF will ensure the effective comparability of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region, facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications among member states, harmonize qualifications wherever possible and create acceptable regional standards where appropriate.

In the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the drive for a single regional market and economy led to the development of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQs), while

the establishment of a regional coordinating mechanism in 2003 was an important factor in the decision to develop a CARICOM TVET Qualifications Framework. The aim of this framework, adopted in 2007, is to ensure the standard and uniform delivery of competency-based TVET within the Caribbean single market. The Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) - the related association of national training organisations - ensures the acceptance and recognition of the associated qualifications throughout the Caribbean, and internationally.

The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an enormous surge in the participation of Higher Education in the integration of systems, in Europe and beyond, requiring a rethink of Higher Education systems internationally. The Bologna Process was created to address the challenges facing Higher Education systems. The Bologna Declaration of the European Ministers of Education pleaded for the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, essentially based on two main cycles, namely, undergraduate and graduate cycles. The degree awarded after the first cycle would be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification for particular kinds of work/ further learning.

Following the European Memorandum of Lifelong Learning (2002), the European Union developed several initiatives to make lifelong learning a reality, launching the European Bologna Process in order to create a clearly recognisable European Area for Higher Education. The EU also launched the Copenhagen Process for developing Vocational Education and Training including measures to promote more quality, mobility and credit transfer in Vocational Education. Around 2004, the EU started to develop the work on a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, which was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2008.

In 2005, the Ministerial Meeting of the countries that participated in the Bologna Process adopted the QF of the European Area for Higher Education (EHEA). This implied that 46 countries in the EHEA committed to developing NQFs compatible with the overarching framework of the EHEA by 2010. This was an extremely optimistic timetable, but helped to raise the momentum for the important steps needed to establish the NQFs for Higher Education qualifications. Ten essential steps were identified in developing these NQFs and in order to self-certify, seven criteria were defined, including ensuring clear and demonstrable links between the qualifications in the NQF and the descriptors of the QF of

the EHEA, and explaining how quality assurance processes underpinned the awarding processes concerned. Bi-annual reports and Ministerial Meetings were used to monitor the progress within and between the countries.

In 2005, it was expected that most countries would be able to self-certificate their NQFs for Higher Education by 2010, but later this deadline was postponed to 2012. In 2015, during the Ministers' meeting in Yerevan, the countries committed to completing their self-certification processes by 2020. The Bologna Process provided a substantial stimulus to initiating the development of national frameworks for Higher Education, but only a few countries which had already implemented NQFs were ready to advance immediately towards self-certification.

The QFs of the EHEA did not initially focus on lifelong learning, but with the advent of the EQF, the focus shifted. Before the Bergen Meeting took place, work on the EQF for Lifelong Learning was already on its way. An expert group led by the European Commission, experts from the Bologna Follow Up Working Group, and European stakeholder representatives from a selected number of Member States, CEDEFOP and the ETF developed a consultation document that was shared with Member States in 2006. The aim was to develop a meta-framework for lifelong learning that would incorporate General Education, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education and Adult Education, and facilitate the recognition of lifelong learning. During the consultation process, Member States welcomed the EQF as a tool and many indicated that they had already or would develop an NQF.

The EQF took many features from the QF of the EHEA, but instead of aiming to shape national systems, it aims rather, to act as a translation tool. While the Bologna Process aims to harmonise the qualification structures around the first and second degree cycles in order to create a clearly recognisable EHEA, there has been no such ambition in the EQF. In Europe, education and vocational training are national prerogatives, and the EU can promote quality, mobility and the exchange of experiences between the countries, but has to respect the diversity of national systems. The EQF therefore, has been designed to be a tool to improve the communication between national qualifications systems, reinforcing rather than replacing national frameworks. The EQF was adopted as a Recommendation to the Member States. It aims to facilitate the comparison of the national qualification systems or frameworks to the EQF. The national development of a

framework with levels was not required, but was recommended. Participation in the EQF is voluntary and is coordinated by the EQF Advisory Group in which all the participating countries are represented, and which is chaired by the European Commission.

The EQF Advisory Group has been discussing the implementation of the EQF among EU members and has been reviewing the national referencing reports in which countries refer their national qualifications levels to the EQF levels that are based on ten criteria. As for the Bologna process, 2010 was the initial deadline for referencing, while by 2012 countries would have started to mention the EQF levels on their certificates. However, these deadlines were also over-optimistic.

The EQF Advisory Group provided for a unique international governance structure that was completed by establishing a national contact point in every country to coordinate the implementation of the EQF. This has probably been the decisive element in achieving the implementation of the EQF in a relatively short time and in strengthening the integration of the QF EHEA and the EQF. Some 38 countries are working on developing their NQFs by referencing to the EQF, and most others have referenced their frameworks. Following the success of the EQF, the development of important RQF initiatives followed in other parts of the world.

The Small States of the Commonwealth established a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) encompassing 32 small countries across the globe, connected through a virtual community that facilitates the exchange of qualifications and programmes. The TQF should become a widely recognised system for the accreditation of Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) courses that should help to establish credibility and facilitate the movement of courses and learners between states.

The Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) probably has the highest concentration of migrants from a large number of countries in the world in an area where international education and training providers and awarding bodies are also very active. It is expected that the GCC QF will link the different QFs in the region, facilitate the recognition of skilled workers, and support the quality assurance of qualifications provided by the public, private and international providers and awarding bodies active in the region.

With the establishment of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Common Market in 2015, freedom of movement of labour is a fact. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework is perhaps the regional framework that is closest to the EQF in terms of objectives and scope, as it also functions as a translation device between the systems in the countries involved.

To enhance the international comparison and recognition of TVET qualifications, the Third International Congress on TVET, organized by UNESCO in Shanghai (China) in May 2012, recommended that the Director General of UNESCO explore the possibility of setting up an international task force to develop international guidelines on quality assurance for the recognition of these qualifications, and identify a set of world reference levels. It was recommended that both of these tasks be based upon learning outcomes.

### ***NQFs as components in donor-funded reform programmes***

In the period 2002-2003, NQFs not only became the core rationale of the EU's Copenhagen process but were also taken up by the main donor and technical development agencies. Qualifications not only outline learning outcomes or competencies that are to be achieved, but they can also influence many other dimensions of the VET system such as testing, the training of trainers and issues of governance and financing (Maurer and Gonon, 2014).

The EU is the biggest donor in the world. It has been sponsoring different projects relating to the development of NQFs. Other donors are also active in this field. NQFs can provide a different angle to the reform of education and training systems that are focused on delivering intended results and on bringing together stakeholders to define qualifications.

## **WHAT HAS MADE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS SO SIGNIFICANT IN DEVELOPING AND TRANSITIONING COUNTRIES?**

Exogenous factors such as the role of the World Bank, and the re-emergence of skills development as a priority in the field of development cooperation were critical junctures for NQF development. The global community also gave importance to skills development, after a long period of focusing on Basic Education, as reported in the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report on Youth and Skills* (UNESCO, 2012).

Policy makers in the Member States saw QFs as being significant for implementing skills development and lifelong learning, particularly with respect to promoting the educational and labour market mobility so central to their education policies. The establishment of NQFs was seen as being a continuation and response to the existing skills agenda and solutions. Skills development policies were already in place in most developing countries faced with the challenges of introducing competency-based approaches, improving the supply of skilled labour, and overcoming the problems of dead-end pathways. However, what made QFs appealing to developing countries lay in endogenous factors primarily, in the large scope that the design of QFs had to offer (Maurer and Gonon, 2014).

The introduction of NQFs offered policy makers the promise of carrying out their skills development reforms, facilitating the permeability of all sub-systems of education and training, as well as creating synergies between formal, non-formal and informal learning, and particularly work-related learning. Given the multiplicity of training programmes run by different providers and under different Ministries, NQFs offered a common basis for all skills programmes (public and private, formal and non-formal) in the countries, in that policy makers could now redefine their concept of skills standards. In countries with large non-formal and informal sectors, policy makers could now refer to skills standards not only in terms of the skills acquired in a formalised training context but also in terms of the skills which were to be achieved in the course of specific training programmes in the context of the world of work, and in continuing adult learning outside the conventional system of education and training. Attempts to broaden the notion of skills development were already on the agendas of several countries. But NQFs offered developing countries the opportunities to harmonise and systematise the skills development programmes of all potential providers.

Closely related to the problem of the lack of comparability of the different skills development programmes, was the fact that previous skills standards in many countries did not cover all economic sectors, particularly the services sectors, including Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and cultural and sports services. The NQF model aims to bring all training programmes from all economic and even cultural and social sectors under one umbrella and to make them an important part of the education and training systems. This scope dimension is particularly relevant for developing countries, as can be seen in the role played by Sector Skills Councils in developing National Occupational Standards. These occupational skills standards are not only those skills or competencies that were previously acquired in a formalised training context; rather

the new understanding of the skills standards approach is to orient skills standards to specific economic trades and services (including social and cultural services), and to locate them at specific occupational levels. The new understanding is that these skills not only cover TVET skills, but also include broader skills, which can be more generic and applied to variety of vocational fields at all levels.

Related to limits in the progression pathways within and between different levels of education and training systems, many developing countries face the problem of dead-end pathways, particularly in vocational training. Generally speaking, mainly graduates of the academic upper secondary school gain formal access to Higher Education. The introduction of NQFs offers the promise of vertical mobility not only from vocational secondary to Higher Education, but also allows technicians to enroll in programmes that could facilitate promotion such as to the level of an engineer, or programmes offered by different Ministries at higher levels.

## IMPACT

In analysing the relationship between NQFs, broader lifelong learning strategies and skills development, one area of impact to be seen in developing countries is in the development of second-chance alternative pathways in the context of their NQFs. These pathways can be summarised as in the following table.

**Table 2: NQFs and alternative progression pathways (Source: Singh, 2016)**

Alternative pathways	Countries
Quality-assured qualifications in continuing and post-secondary and employment fields	Hong Kong; Singapore; New Zealand; Australia, Maldives, Malaysia, Mexico, Turkey
Alternative transitions between VET and Higher Education	Sri Lanka, Bhutan, India, Republic of Korea
Transitions between primary and post-primary education and VET	Nepal, Ghana, India, Uganda, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Gambia, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles
Alternative transitions from non-formal education to formal Basic Education	Bangladesh, Gambia, Philippines, Mauritius, Thailand
Certification-oriented second-chance qualification programmes for/in the informal sector	Ghana, Gambia, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Mexico

Impact for end-users and 'final beneficiaries' is still far away in countries that have recently initiated a QF. Countries are at different stages of development, and moving from concepts to system-wide implementation is challenging. It requires that the NQF is introduced within a wider policy reform framework that not only addresses the qualifications and standards, and quality assurance, but also supports providers, labour market intelligence, and improved career information for end-users.

In a number of countries like Scotland, Ireland and Estonia, the NQF has become a well-known reference that is used to communicate learning, career opportunities, and vacancies for citizens.

## **LESSONS LEARNED: OUTCOMES OF NQFs ARE DEPENDENT ON A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC FACTORS**

This section of the paper deals with some lessons learned over past 20 years, regarding NQFs. It highlights some factors necessary for QFs to be realised.

The first lesson is that the outcomes of NQFs depend on how well they are aligned to the national education and training systems with which they are linked. Aligning an NQF to a national education/training system is a big task. Implementing the NQF instrument in a detached way from policies, and subordinating it to just development cooperation projects may result in building blocks, instruments and project outcomes, but it does not usually result in coherent policies and system development in the country. This issue is particularly relevant when it comes to the issue of transferring QF models.

An important lesson is that while instruments and approaches are transferable across countries, policies and systems are not, as notions of education/training and learning outcomes are culturally and socially embedded. What is encouraging is that more and more countries have begun to use NQFs as starting points to compare existing programmes and to analyse the existing and potential pathways for upward mobility in different education and training fields.

The outcomes of NQFs need to take context into account. In India for example, as per the 66<sup>th</sup> Round of the National Sample Survey (NSS) (2009-10), vocationally trained people in the age group of 15-19 years account for 10% of the labour force. In comparison, 96% of the workers in South Korea receive formal skills training. In Japan, this figure is 80%,

and in Germany, 75% (Prasad, 2013:13). The figure for the UK stands at 68%.

The principles of inclusiveness and access, and the pursuit of equity represent crucial factors in justifying NQFs. Although policy decisions towards the development of NQFs in many of the countries surveyed have been influenced by economic considerations around economic competitiveness, economic productivity and the skills needed for employability, there is equal appreciation, by governments, of establishing through NQF, learning pathways for marginalised groups. There is also an unequivocal understanding of, and support for, the potential of NQFs as empowerment tools, for recognising non-formal and informal learning for marginalised populations and individuals. One of governments' goals regarding NQFs is to secure the increased participation of individuals from lower socio-economic groups in education and training. In Africa, more and more countries are designing TVET certification systems with the intention of catering for early school leavers at the post-primary levels, as well as for pathways back into the general education system.

It is important however, that quality is not sacrificed in the pursuit of access. Governments need to understand that the shift to an outcomes-based approach has many implications for assessment, validation and certification, as well as for learning and teaching strategies. Traditionally, assessment has been based on the requirements of, and expected performance in, formal education and training. This process however, is not suitable in a lifelong learning system that recognises a diversification of learning paths. In New Zealand, for example, there is no difference between the recognition of outcomes from non-formal and informal learning (RPL) and assessment against designated learning outcomes or standards which make up the qualifications. In Australia, workplace learning assessment includes assessment of formal, non-formal and informal learning. In contrast, in developing countries such as Bangladesh, most informal and non-formal workplace learning has not met some quality assurance requirements such as accreditation, and is not recognised through any credit transfer arrangements. This situation can be contrasted with that in Australia, where credit transfer arrangements exist even for workplace learning.

The outcomes of NQFs depend on the use of learning outcomes in a broad sense. The use of learning outcomes can promote clarity and thus enhance participation through emphasising the relevance of programmes. However, learning outcomes require attention in several respects. At the level of policy, learning outcomes need to be overarching; at the level qualifications standards, they need to deal with intended learning outcomes;

and at the level of learning programmes, they need to deal with specific learning outcomes that are related to inputs and have a more pedagogical purpose (UNESCO, 2013:148). Learning outcomes should not be formulated in narrow and restricted ways, which could limit rather than broaden the expectations of learners (*Ibid.*).

From a lifelong learning perspective, learning outcomes need to reflect all contexts from life-wide, life-deep and lifelong perspectives. They need to include learning behaviours, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and competences. All these aspects are required for personal growth; spiritual, social and economic well-being; democratic citizenship; cultural identity, and employability. In a number of countries, more discussion and research is needed to shape the concept of skills so that the notion of skills is not restricted to productive skills only but reaches these other areas of human capabilities.

The implementation of NQFs is a multi-year process. It takes a long time before the results become visible and often too long to keep the momentum of change going, if there is not enough ownership of the initiative and/or if the challenges are too big. Securing trusted qualifications requires more than the creation of an NQF, however valuable that may be as a discrete part of the reform efforts. It requires stable and enduring arrangements, in particular stakeholder ownership; proportionate legislation; institutions with effective capacities, and reliable quality assurance mechanisms. These arrangements are about ensuring that the qualifications system is well-organised. Developing and transitioning countries which experience a lack of stakeholder involvement, lack of appropriate laws that are aligned with each other, and effective institutions, and which lack trust in their existing qualifications, tend to have difficulties in establishing fit-for-purpose arrangements. Existing arrangements from industrialised countries are based on very different social, economic and cultural values that cannot be transposed into the settings of transitioning and developing countries, where trust in the existing qualifications is lower. It is important therefore that there be exchanges of experiences between transitioning and developing countries to share how functional qualifications can be established.

Developments over the past 20 years have shown that NQF policy and practice require a culture of exchange and debate. Cooperation between the public and private sectors requires dialogue between the stakeholders concerned. In the context of EQF developments, platforms such as advisory groups, open coordination methods and peer learning have played a major role. The joint venture between UNESCO, CEDEFOP, and the ETF

with regard to the Global Inventory of National and RQFs, emphasizes the importance of policy learning, benchmark learning and the promotion of common understandings. Policy dialogues through the sharing of experiences and strategies for education and training, are integral to the missions of all of these organisations. The idea is to promote synergies instead of the usual dispersion of efforts. Sharing good practice adds value to the many learning reforms which different actors are conducting in different regions. It takes into account common understandings and convergence in outlooks. At the same time learning from different country contexts is relevant for promoting the idea of social diversity.

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# The South African National Qualifications Framework: Reflections on the Past 20 Years, and Current Priorities

*Dr Heidi Bolton and Mr Joe Samuels*

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reflection on post-1994 progress in the national system for education, training, development and work in South Africa. Under *apartheid* the system was racially segregated, unequal and unfair. Different types of learning, qualifications and learning contexts did not enjoy equal respect. The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a mechanism to address past injustices, was designed to integrate this system, make it accessible for everyone, and enable quality learning, transparency, and mobility along learning-and-work pathways. The intention from the start of democracy was, and remains, that the NQF must enable individual development, as well as contributing to the social and economic development of the country as a whole. There must be no dead-ends or misleading paths in the system.

The NQF is simultaneously a grid of qualifications and a 'relational device' – a means to integrate and bring the different parts of the system into relationship with each other (Bolton and Keevy, 2011; 2012). It requires 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2014) – that different role-players enter into dialogue with, and seek to understand and engage with, the motives of others in the system. The NQF is necessarily a contested object as its broad range of stakeholders negotiate its implementation and further development. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is mandated to oversee this implementation and development (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008). SAQA and the Quality Councils are responsible for implementing the NQF.

This paper touches on what has been achieved in South Africa in the past 20 years, in relation to the NQF objectives of a single integrated national framework for learning achievements that is transparent, facilitates access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths; enhances the quality and international

comparability of education and training, and accelerates the redress of past unfair discrimination.

The paper points to shifts in public understandings and ways of doing over time, and transformation highlights. It closes by pointing to the main priorities for the immediate and medium-term future.

## **INTEGRATING EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In the early years of the South African democracy there was recognition that integration was “complex and challenging” (French 2009: 44). There was opposition against, and also support for it. Integration at this time was officially expressed as bringing ‘all learning under a single framework of outcomes-based standards and qualifications’ (Department of Education-Department of Labour [DoE-DoL], 2002). Debates ranged around whether there should be ‘an integrated system of’ education and training or an ‘integrated approach to’ it, with the latter view dominating.

### ***Systemic integration achieved***

Structural integration and a centralised system for standards development and quality assurance were achieved within a decade.

#### **Single national system**

In the early days under the SAQA Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995) adopting an integrated approach meant that there were two different departments, one for education (the DoE) and one for training (the DoL), with SAQA ‘providing the glue’ to hold the system together. This centralised standard-setting system was contested, and following NQF reviews between 2002 and 2005, and the development of a ‘Joint Policy Statement’ (DoE-DoL, 2007), the SAQA Act was replaced with a differentiated coordinated system under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008).

Under the NQF Act the integration of the system was consolidated. The DoE was split into the Department of Basic Education (DBE) which oversees all schooling and the

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), which oversees all Post-School Education and Training (PSET), including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Higher Education, Worker Education, and Adult Education and Training (AET). Under the SAQA Act, over-arching responsibility lay with the Minister of Education who had to consult with the Minister of Labour. Under the NQF Act, the Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET) has full responsibility of all the NQF Bodies reporting to him. His plans for the PSET system are laid out in the seminal White Paper for PSET (MHET, 2013).

Under the NQF Act There are three differentiated NQF Sub-Frameworks – the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) – each overseen by a Quality Council<sup>4</sup>. SAQA inter alia coordinates the Sub-Frameworks.

The *System of Collaboration* (SAQA, 2011d) was developed collaboratively by the NQF partners to guide mutual relations between SAQA and the three Quality Councils in a way that promotes constructive cooperation in line with the NQF Act. The *System of Collaboration* includes six integrating structures, of which the Ministry of Higher Education and Training is one.

The SAQA Board and Quality Council Councils, established by the NQF Act, make up the second set of integrating structures. As determined by the NQF Act, the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of SAQA and the Quality Councils are members of the SAQA Board and Quality Councils. When serving on the SAQA Board or Quality Councils, the CEOs are “required to participate without prejudice or favour towards any specific Board or Council” (SAQA, 2011d: Clause 9[d]).

The third and fourth integrating structures are the NQF Forum and Inter-Departmental NQF Steering Committee. The NQF Forum comprises the MHET, the Director General of Higher Education and Training, the CEOs of SAQA and the Quality Councils, and Inter-Departmental NQF Steering Committee members (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 10). The Inter-Departmental NQF Steering Committee was established by the Director-General of

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4 Umalusi oversees the GFETQSF; the Council on Higher Education (CHE) oversees the HEQSF, and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) oversees the OQSF.

Higher Education and Training (DG DHET) with the agreement of the Director-General of Basic Education; its members were chosen by the DG DHET (*Op.Cit.:* Clause 12). The purpose of the NQF Forum is high-level and strategic; it convenes four times a year, and is cancelled when there are no substantial issues to address. The role of the Inter-Departmental Committee is to coordinate the NQF responsibilities of the two departments, and to advise the DG DHET and the NQF Forum (*Ibid.*).

The fifth integrating structure is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Committee comprising the CEOs of SAQA and the Quality Councils. The purpose of the CEO Committee is to develop high-level understanding of the inter-relationships between the three NQF Sub-Frameworks, and between the three Sub-Frameworks and the NQF (SAQA, 2011d: Clause 11). It is a permanent sub-committee of the NQF Forum. It is chaired by SAQA's CEO. Working groups are set up by the CEO Committee for specific projects identified by the Committee, and chaired by SAQA or Quality Council staff nominated to do so by the Committee (*Ibid.*:13).

The *System of Collaboration* was designed to promote systemic integration, and the setting up of its structures is a measure of systemic integration as such structures were not present previously. Like the *System of Collaboration*, the *NQF Implementation Framework* (SAQA, 2011a) was developed to enhance systemic integration. It was developed under the guidance of the NQF Forum and is 'owned' by the CEO Committee (*Ibid.*: Clause 3). It identifies the processes by means of which SAQA and the Quality Councils will ensure full realisation of their roles regarding the implementation and further development of the NQF (*Ibid.*: Clause 4).

## **Structural integration in the provision of education and training**

Under the SAQA Act the 17 race-based (school) education departments were almost immediately integrated into a single national Department of Education (DoE) – now referred to as the DBE – with provincial counterparts<sup>5</sup>. Within a decade, the public Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and Technical Schools were rationalised into 50 FET Colleges – now the TVET Colleges. Similarly, the race-based public Higher

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<sup>5</sup> The National DoE, now the DBE, is responsible for national education policy development; the Provincial DoEs must oversee the implementation of these policies, in their provinces. There are national examinations in the final (twelfth) year of secondary school, and national tests at Grades 3, 6, and 9 levels. There have been some national tests for Grades 1, 2, 4, 5.

Education Institutions (HEIs) were amalgamated to form 21 institutions; a further five have since been established so that each of the nine provinces of the country has at least one HEI. In the Trade and Occupations sector – and the system as a whole – for the first time there was a single national system for the development of standards, and quality assurance, albeit with a proliferation of bodies to do this work (DoE-DoL, 2002).

### ***Deepening articulation in the integrated system***

Several articulation-related initiatives have supported the integrated approach to education and training in South Africa.

#### **Focus on lifelong learning**

From the start, there has been a focus on lifelong learning – on learner progression through the system for education, training, and work – as evidenced in the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995: Clause 2[b]) and the National Standards Body requirements to use the “critical and cross-field outcomes to promote lifelong learning” (RSA, 1995; SAQA, 1998b: Clause 8[c])<sup>6</sup>. In the first decade of NQF implementation while there were known barriers in some learning pathways (see Cosser, 2009; Carrim, 2010), there were working pathways (Carrim, 2010).

#### **Focus on learning pathways**

Dedicated recently-concluded SAQA-Rhodes University partnership research into learning pathways has deepened understandings of ‘systemic integration’ and ‘articulation’. Different purposes, forms and aspects of articulation are acknowledged (Lotz-Sisitka, 2015). It can be seen broadly, as ‘systemic articulation’ or a ‘joined up’ system incorporating qualifications and various other elements aligned to and supportive of, learning pathways. It can be seen more specifically, in terms of the structuring of qualifications and curricula to allow progression, with or without intra- or inter-institutional agreements for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). It can refer to the individualised pathways that learners follow as they progress, and are supported in, their learning and work. The concept

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<sup>6</sup> Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFOs) refer to those generic outcomes that inform all teaching and learning. For example CCFOs may include working effectively with others as a member of a team, and/or collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information.

of ‘transitions’ – between training and work, work and training, school or College and Higher Education, and so on – has emerged (*Ibid.*): providing systemic support for transitioning is important for learner progression and lifelong learning.

### **Articulation policy**

Draft Articulation Policy was developed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in 2014 and refined in 2016 (MHET, 2016a). This policy addresses some of the remaining structural constraints for articulation. It builds on existing NQF policies, providing additional principles and ‘policy statements’ to enable the implementation of credible articulation, and the articulation-related responsibilities of each of the NQF implementing organisations.

### **NQF Level Descriptors**

The 10 South African NQF Level Descriptors – each a description of learning achievements or outcomes that are appropriate for qualifications at that level – have proved to be a mechanism for developing coherence within and across the three Sub-Frameworks (CHE, QCTO, Umalusi, in SAQA, 2015a:301-379). This trend is echoed internationally (Keevy and Chakroun, 2014). By describing the applied competences at each NQF level in terms of scope of knowledge; knowledge literacy; methods and procedures; problem-solving; ethics and professionalism; accessing, processing, managing, producing and communicating information; context/system understanding; and accountability (SAQA, 2012a), the Level Descriptors demonstrate the parity of general, academic, and vocational knowledge and skills – at policy level. There is still a need for educational work around the *use* of the Level Descriptors, and to share good practice, for systemic enrichment.

### **Registering qualifications; enhancing articulation and parity of esteem**

Before 1995 the variety of learning offerings available was racially skewed, with an absence of cross-cutting national criteria to ensure quality. The SAQA Act and establishment of the NQF led to the development of the NSB Regulations (SAQA, 1998b), which for the first time stipulated national minimum criteria for the registration of qualifications and part-qualifications. Later under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), the rules for the systematic organization of differentiated qualifications nationally, and for enhancing access to this

integrated system, were set by the Policy and Criteria for Registering Qualifications and Part-Qualifications on the NQF (SAQA, 2013c), and national policies for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) (SAQA, 2002; 2004; 2013a; 2015c), and national Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) (SAQA, 2014c).

The early policies provided the broad over-arching principles and criteria according to which the NSBs registered qualifications under the SAQA Act; their later differentiated counterparts under the NQF Act required that the Quality Councils develop corresponding Sub-Framework policies. These policies have pointed the national focus towards the cross-cutting relationships between parts of the system, as well as in the case of the Quality Councils, towards the relationships between the components of each Sub-Framework (SAQA, 2013c; Umalusi in SAQA, 2015a:251-2). Under the NQF Act, SAQA-Quality Council co-development of the over-arching policies sought to shape them in ways that supported differentiated implementation while at the same time meeting the integrated NQF requirements. The requirement since 2012, that each qualification be submitted to SAQA by a Quality Council for evaluation towards registration on the NQF (SAQA, 2013c), is an example of these developments. Since the promulgation of the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), 790 qualifications have been registered. A parallel process has involved the alignment of previously registered qualifications to the current requirements of the respective NQF Sub-Frameworks.

The potential for articulation between qualifications, enhancing access to, and progression in learning pathways, was deepened with the publication of the Policy and Criteria for Registering Qualifications and Part-Qualifications on the NQF (SAQA, 2013c), and the national policies for RPL and CAT (SAQA, 2013a; 2014c; 2015c). The NSB Regulations (SAQA, 1998b: Clause 7[1]) required *inter alia* specification of the learning outcomes to be assessed, assessment criteria, and the scope, contexts, and levels for unit standards – all of which could be used to enhance articulation, but without explicit reference to articulation. The recent policy for registering qualifications (SAQA, 2013c: Clause 31) goes further, requiring identification of the full qualification of which a part-qualification is part, within an NQF Sub-Framework, for registration. In other words in order to be registered, part-qualifications cannot be stand-alone dead-ends: they need to be part of full qualifications. In addition, they need to meet the criteria laid down for the Sub-Framework qualification types; indicate the learning pathways within which they are positioned, and provide the horizontal, vertical and diagonal articulation possibilities

they open. Further, qualifications that are internationally comparable need to determine articulation possibilities with qualifications in other national, and regional, qualifications frameworks (*Ibid.*: Clause 38[k]).

Under the SAQA Act, the NSB Regulations (SAQA, 1998b: Clause 7(1)[j] and 8(1)[b],[h]) requirements that to be registered on the NQF, qualifications had to specify “learning assumed to be in place”; open “access-routes” so that “the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part, through the recognition of prior learning” focused national attention on opening access for all learners, especially those previously excluded from the system. The policy for registering qualifications under the NQF Act (SAQA, 2013c: Clause 38[m]) further strengthens access by requiring that institutional RPL policies must state how RPL will be applied to enable gaining entry to, or achieving, qualifications or parts of qualifications.

### **Integrating professional bodies**

Professional bodies have been integrated into the South African education and training system through the collaboratively-developed Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation (SAQA, 2012b). This policy recognises professional bodies’ alignment to values in the NQF and the Constitution of the country, while preserving the autonomy of their specialised expertise.

Eight high-level criteria (SAQA, 2012b) provide guidance for the recognition of professional bodies. The recognition requirements include being legally constituted with the human and financial resources to undertake the functions required; protecting public interests; the ability to develop, award, monitor, and revoke professional designations; publishing and implementing a code of conduct; providing SAQA with lists of members; practising inclusivity and enhancing lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is supported through the requirements that professional bodies have policies and practices for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for their members; make career advice available, and develop RPL routes towards professional designations<sup>7</sup>.

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7 There is no single definition for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) nationally or internationally. Conceptualisations range from seeing CPD as all natural learning experiences (informal learning) as well as planned activities designed to benefit individuals and organisations or society (Day, 1999), to seeing it as ‘the systematic maintenance, improvement and broadening of knowledge and skills’ and the individual development of the abilities to execute ‘professional and technical duties’ throughout an engineering career (Engineering Council of South Africa). Recent research (SAQA, 2015b) sought to shed light on the different approaches and practices relating to the basic features and requirements of CPD in South Africa.

Since publication of this policy in 2012, 85 Professional Bodies have been recognized and recorded on the official Register of Professional Bodies in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). A further 26 are in the process of being recognised: the trend is that an increasing number of professional bodies have applied for recognition.

### **The National Learners Records Database (NLRD) and integration**

The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) is a relational database developed and managed by SAQA as the electronic information system of the NQF since 1998. It is a strong integrating device as it contains information on, and relates:

- all qualifications and part-qualifications registered on the NQF;
- education and training providers, including their accreditation status, and providers of RPL;
- recognized professional bodies and registered professional designations; and
- learner achievements for all studies undertaken in the country other than those for schooling below Grade 12, including some achievements via RPL<sup>8</sup>.

### **NQF research and integration**

NQF research and its dissemination also serve as integrating devices. In line with its mandate, SAQA conducts and commissions research, and publishes the findings, on matters relating to the implementation and further development of the NQF (RSA, 2008). This work supports SAQA's oversight role, provides evidence for policy development and implementation, builds communities of practice, and aids transparency in the system. SAQA has a small internal research unit and expands its research capacity through a research partnership model<sup>9</sup>.

### **Comparing the two NQF research conferences hosted by SAQA under the NQF Act – in**

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8 It was voluntary to submit RPL-related data for inclusion in the NLRD up to 2012. After publication of the revised national RPL policy (SAQA, 2013a; 2015b), it became a requirement for all education and training providers to submit their RPL-related data via the relevant Quality Council.

9 SAQA's long-term Research Partnerships to date (2008-2016) have focussed on (1) Articulation possibilities between selected qualifications; (2) Groundwork for the NQF Impact Study; (3) Workplace learning for sustainable development; (4) Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College lecturers; (5) A maximally inclusive RPL model in the context of the South African NQF; (6) Learning pathways; (7) flexible learning and teaching provision (FLTP) to enhance lifelong learning, and (8) college-university articulation.

2010 and 2013 – shows shifts in national thinking towards, and deepened understandings of, articulation and integration. The 2010 conference Towards a map of NQF-related research (SAQA, 2010) focused on the full range of NQF objectives. On the other hand the 2013 event Building integration and articulation focused entirely on systemic integration, the extent to which system components were articulated, and aspects, approaches, and mechanisms that support articulation (SAQA, 2013b). The numbers of participating delegates tripled in this period, suggesting increased knowledge of, and buy-in for, the NQF over time.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE INTEGRATED SYSTEM**

The NQF was designed to address the lack of national quality assurance and transparency under apartheid, to ensure that information about the system were made available systematically to the public, and that principles and procedures were fair – for the first time in the country.

### ***Inherited systemic ‘quality’ and lack of transparency***

Quality assurance in General and Further Education and Training under *apartheid* was more about ‘quality control’ than quality assurance, and focused on “measuring outputs, *post facto*, based on inspection and sampling” (French, 2009: 51). Umalusi’s predecessor, the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT) for example focused mainly on quality assuring the examination ‘products’ (exam and test papers, marking memoranda), marking of scripts, and monitoring the administration of the national ‘exit’ exams (Umalusi, in SAQA 2015a).

In Higher Education, quality assurance was achieved through institutional arrangements. It involved external examiners (in some instances internal examiners, or a mixture of internal and external examiners) and the accreditation of individual programmes by the Universities and Technicons Advisory Council (CHE, in SAQA 2015a).

In the Trades and Occupations sector, the Manpower Training Act (RSA, 1981) provided for the regulation of skills development. Any employer, employee, or organized business or labour group could establish a Training Board in a sub-sector by creating a constitution

in line with this Act. The biggest challenges with this system were the highly unfair legislated unevenness of opportunities available for people from different population groups<sup>10</sup>, and the absence of standardized curricula and fees (QCTO, in SAQA 2015a).

### ***Early moves towards national quality and transparency***

The centralised standards-setting system ushered in by the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995; SAQA, 1998a, 1998b) provided publicly-known minimum criteria for worthwhile qualifications, including processes to protect the public from fraudulent practices. SAQA established three types of national quality assurance bodies: Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies, National Standards Bodies (NSBs), and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs)<sup>11</sup>. There were ETQAs, for the *economic, education and social* sectors respectively<sup>12</sup>. NSBs had strategic oversight for establishing standards and qualifications in one of 12 designated NQF fields; SGBs generated qualifications and part-qualifications within specialized areas within these fields (SAQA, 1998a; 2000a; 2000b)<sup>13</sup>. The Act also made provision for education and training providers, and assessment bodies.

For the first time in South Africa, there was one quality assurance system for education and training for everyone in the country. There were tensions however, as revealed in the NQF review (DoE-DoL, 2002). There was an unwieldy proliferation of standards in specific job-related competencies; the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were not universally recognized; collaboration between the various quality assurance bodies was lacking (*Ibid.*). SAQA reported to the Minister of Education (MoE); the MoE had to consult with the Minister of Labour (MoL); SAQA was able to

10 The idea of population groups is a social construct developed in South Africa under *apartheid* to distinguish between groups of people on the basis of skin colour and assumed social backgrounds, for the purposes of separate development and unfair political gain. The categorisations used are widely known to have been dubious. They are currently used in the democratic context purely for the purposes of redress, equity, and equality.

11 ETQAs were quality assurance bodies accredited in terms of Section 5(1)(a[2]) of the SAQA Act, to monitor and audit achievements in terms of national qualifications and standards (SAQA, 1998). NSBs and SGBs, registered in terms of the same Section of the Act, were responsible for establishing standards and qualifications (*Ibid.*).

12 Examples of the ETQAs in the economic sector included around 20 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) – one for each economic sector – and the professional bodies. The two accredited education ETQAs were Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, and the Council on Higher Education (CHE). ETQAs in the social sector included Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and others.

13 Standards were defined as 'registered statements of desired education and training outcomes' with their 'associated assessment criteria' (SAQA, 200b:8). The 12 NQF fields are broad areas of learning (eg. Business; Communication and Language; Education, Training and Development, etcetera) (SAQA, 1998a).

publish regulations according to the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995), without consulting the Ministers. The then-DoE recommended that SAQA be more fully under its control; the DoL recommended that SAQA report to both ministers (DoE-DoL, 2002). This stalemate lasted until the Joint Policy Statement (DoE-DoL, 2007), which paved the way for the promulgation of the NQF Act (RSA, 2008).

### **Early national quality assurance in General and Further Education and Training**

When Umalusi took over from SAFCERT in 2001 it continued to quality assure national external assessments for the qualifications for which it was responsible, but for the first time, these assessments were *linked to national curricula* for all learners. Umalusi enabled the strengthening of the then-new national curricula, establishing a new quality assurance model through research and benchmarking. Umalusi also quality assured the *provision* (system inputs) of education, by accrediting the private providers under its jurisdiction, and the *certification* of learners successful in its exams. The extensive research it conducted, used as a foundation for its policies and processes, and disseminated to the public via workshops, distinguished Umalusi from its predecessor.

### **Quality and transparency in Higher Education**

The SAQA Act and Education White Paper 3: A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997) laid the foundation for the first national quality assurance in Higher Education. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) established a quality assurance model that included:

- a system for accrediting programmes at Higher Education Institutions (HEI);
- a national review process to benchmark South African qualifications internationally; and
- a framework for auditing HEI policies and procedures relating to teaching, research, and community engagement, as well as governance and administration – also referred to 'institutional audits' (CHE, in SAQA, 2015a).

## **Quality and transparency in the Trades and Occupations sector**

The integrated system initially included within SAQA, a unit responsible for developing qualifications and unit standards, including those for the Trades and Occupations sector. SAQA also accredited the Education and Training Quality Assurors (ETQAs) including the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and others.

### ***Enhanced quality and transparency under the NQF Act***

Under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), the executive responsibility for quality assurance was moved from SAQA, and from the range of 'pre-NQF Act' ETQAs, to the three differentiated and coordinated Quality Councils. The development of standards, and quality assurance, are now 'under the same roof' for each Quality Council, and the distinct approach of each is recognised. The determination of the three NQF Sub-Frameworks together with SAQA evaluation of the Quality Council-submitted qualifications for registration on the NQF, enable differentiated and publicly visible current national quality assurance processes. The NQF Level Descriptors; NLRD; development of the NQF policy suite by SAQA after consultation with the Quality Councils; and various NQF advocacy and support services – and the communities that have developed around these initiatives – enable transparency by making by making accessible, quality criteria, processes, and related information<sup>14</sup>.

### **Accreditation, recognition, and achievement status; use of the searchable databases**

Table 1 shows the average numbers of visits per month to the searchable databases of qualifications and part-qualifications in the NLRD, from 2007 when the usage statistics were first measured. These numbers provide some indication of public awareness of the NQF and the NLRD, which in turn provide some indication of the transparency of the system.

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<sup>14</sup> These services and the developments relating to them are detailed below.

**Table 1: Average numbers of visits per month to the searchable databases of qualifications and part-qualifications in the NLRD (Source: NLRD)**

Year	Average numbers per month
2007/8	92 000
2008/9	(approximate) 80 000
2009/10	184 677
2010/11	187 903
2011/12	140 220
2012/13	Not measured
2013/14	199 400

**Accreditation of education and training providers; recognition of professional bodies; learner achievement; and transparency**

Members of the public can access the NLRD at any time, to check up on the accreditation status of providers of education and training, and the recognition-status of professional bodies. Currently there are:

- 8 601 registered assessors (and a total of 209 297 current plus past registered assessors),
- 32 quality assurance entities that load learner achievements into the NLRD,
- 3 982 providers accredited to offer 10 503 qualifications (and a total of 13 706 current plus past accredited providers),
- 85 recognised professional bodies, and
- 13 383 089 qualification achievement records, of which 28 969 were achieved through RPL<sup>15</sup>.

While the majority of institutions of learning in the country are currently accredited or in the process of seeking accreditation, from time to time accredited institutions step out of line. Unregulated on-line provision remains a potential source of risk.

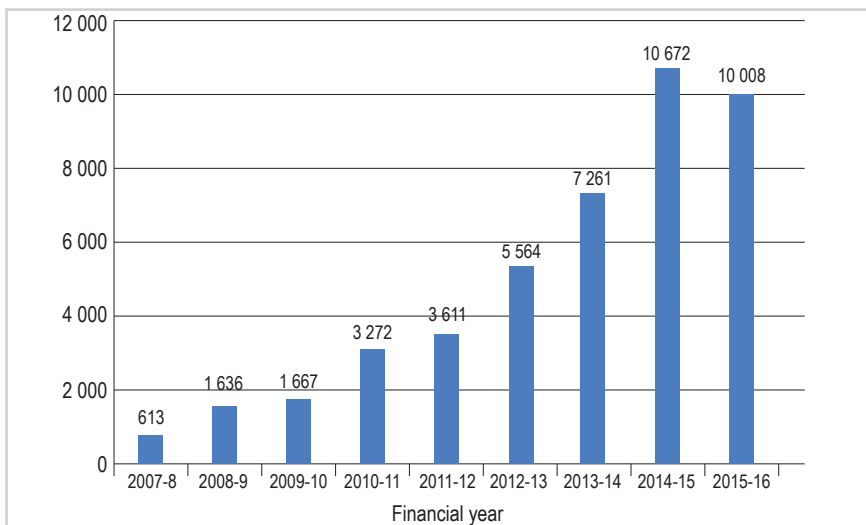
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<sup>15</sup> Submission of qualification achievement records achieved through RPL only became mandatory in 2013 (SAQA, 2013).

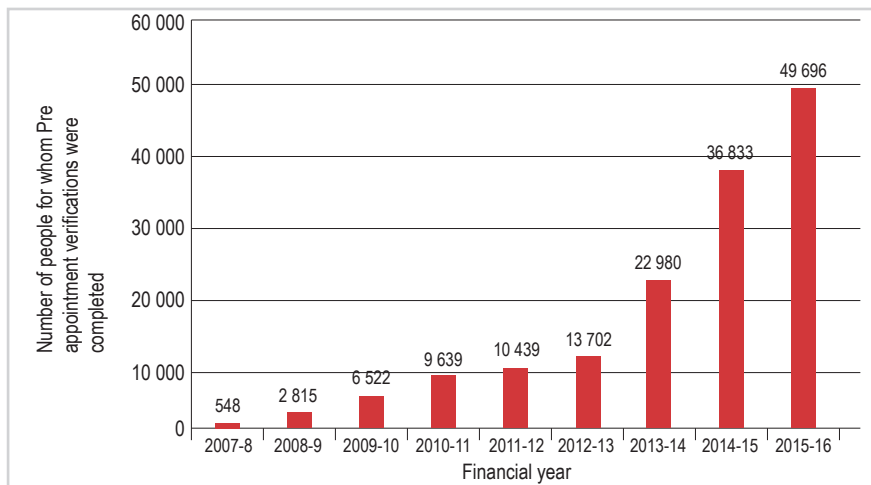
## Verification of learner records

The transparency apparatus of the system includes services for verifying the authenticity of learner records (qualifications and part-qualifications held by learners). These services have existed in South Africa since 1997; user data show increasing public awareness of their availability over time. Following the Directive first issued by the Minister of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) in April 2010, SAQA has worked closely with the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), requesting government and provincial departments to verify their employees' qualifications with SAQA. Since 2015 SAQA has been the only verification service provider that the Public Service is allowed to use, as per the Directive issued by the MPSA in October 2015.

Three types of requests can be accommodated, namely individual requests for records of personal learning achievements; employer requests for verification of the learning achievements of prospective employees; and organisations' requests for bulk verifications for all their employees. Figures 1 and 2 show the trends of requests over time: the numbers of individual/third party requests increased at rates higher than those at which the population increased in the same period.



**Figure 1: Numbers of individual verifications requests across nine financial years (Source: SAQA Verification Services, May 2016)**



**Figure 2: Numbers of people for whom pre-appointment verifications were completed, across nine financial years (Source: SAQA Verification Services, May 2016)**

Table 2 shows the relatively low numbers and percentages of *people* (applicants to the Public Service) who were found to have misrepresented their qualifications, and of misrepresented *records*.

**Table 2: Summary analysis of misrepresented qualifications among applicants to the Public Service found via the SAQA verifications process from 1 October 2009 to 31 March 2016 (Source: SAQA Verification Services, April 2016)**

<b>Number of people who have been found to have misrepresented their qualifications</b>	
Number of people with one or more misrepresented qualifications	798
Total people	88 228
% People with one or more misrepresented qualifications	0.9%
<b>Number of misrepresented records found in all records submitted for verification</b>	
Number of misrepresented records	828
Total records	151 897
% Misrepresented records	0.5%

## **Deepening across-country transparency and learner and worker mobility through comparison: evaluating foreign qualifications**

SAQA collaborates with four communities of practice in the evaluation of foreign qualifications, building transparency and the potential for learner and worker mobility through dialogue, and publicised processes and tools:

- the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), around work and study visas,
- institutions of learning, around formal study,
- professional bodies, around professional registration and licensing, and
- employers, around work.

Requests for evaluations have increased steeply over time – a trend linked to the publication of the Immigration Regulations of 2005 (DHA, 2005) which made it mandatory for all applications for work and quota permits and permanent residency, to include a SAQA evaluation of the foreign qualifications held by applicants.

### **Across-country collaboration, legal agreements and accords**

South African participation in a number of across-country Agreements has assisted the transparency of the South African system, and the wider systems of which it is part. South Africa has Bilateral Agreements with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and Malaysia, respectively. These Agreements specify which qualifications issued in the state format in each country, are recognised as being equivalent to their counterparts in the other country concerned.

In November 2014 SAQA convened a Verifications Seminar *Building trust: Promoting genuine qualifications in Africa through effective verification*, for the African countries from which South Africa receives most applications for immigration. The purpose of the event was to bring together key stakeholders on the African continent to set up a network for the verification of qualifications, so that fraudulent practices can be countered through formal trust relationships combined with quick, innovative (digital) and effective processes, including the reduction of costs. SAQA has since also played a leading role in the

Groningen Declaration Network<sup>16</sup>. Both of these initiatives reached further milestones through SAQA-hosted meetings in Cape Town, in May 2016.

Transparency also continues to be enhanced by professional bodies entering into international recognition agreements to enable the mobility of professional skills internationally. South African qualifications are widely recognised in this context<sup>17</sup>.

### **Movements of South Africans to other countries: benchmarking potential**

Prior to 1994, South Africans could not travel freely across countries. Analysis of the movements of South Africans out of the country under democracy offers some benchmarking potential for qualifications obtained in the country, although the measurement of emigration patterns is challenging (Jaftha, Zuzani and Burger, 2013). Perceptions of South African qualifications in other countries have contributed to *post hoc* benchmarking of these qualifications. A study was undertaken by SAQA in 2012 (*Ibid.*) to investigate how South African qualifications were recognised in Australia. Recognition agreements between Australia and South Africa were found in five professional fields.

### **Career advice and development services**

Prior to democracy in South Africa, career development advice was individualised and usually attracted fees or conditions of membership. A Memorandum of Agreement between SAQA and the DHET in 2010 led to the establishment of the NQF and Career Advice Services Project to provide expanded affordable access to information, advice and guidance for all, through a multi-channel service, in all 11 official languages. The project was overseen by SAQA, financed by the National Skills Fund, and ran from September 2010 to October 2013, when it was transferred to the DHET. In this three-year period the initiative reached around two million people per year (UWESO, 2013);

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16 The Groningen Declaration seeks common ground in serving the academic and professional mobility needs of citizens world-wide by bringing together key stakeholders in the Digital Student Data Ecosystem. The Groningen Declaration Network aims to make Digital Student Data Portability possible, and to enable citizens across the world to consult and share their authentic educational data with whomever they want, when they want to do so.

17 The Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) Accords provide an example of the status of particular South African qualifications abroad. ECSA is a SAQA-recognised Professional Body and is signatory to the Washington (1989), Sydney (2001), and Dublin (2002) Accords, amongst others. According to these arrangements, the foreign engineering graduates of accredited programs in signatory countries are regarded as having met the academic requirements for entry to the practice of engineering in the country indicated (International Engineering Alliance, 2013). Engineers, Engineering Technologists, and Engineering Technicians with South African qualifications have full rights to practice in the signature countries.

it continues to reach large numbers of people.

### **Being aware of, understanding, and valuing the NQF**

An important part of the success of a national initiative is public knowledge, understanding and valuing of its value. In an independent study (Quest, 2014), purposive samples of 40 interviews were conducted with NQF policy makers; 370 with NQF policy implementers, and 463 with NQF policy beneficiaries, to determine the extent to which the South African NQF is known, understood and valued in these contexts.

The study found that amongst policy makers, 100% of the interviewees knew about the NQF, 67% had deep understanding of it, and that this 67% valued it or aspects of it. Of the 370 policy implementers interviewed, 100% were aware of the NQF, 61% had deep understanding, and 58% valued it in some way. Of the 463 policy beneficiaries – most of whom were in the 16-35 years age group; spoke isiZulu (46%), isiXhosa (27%), Sesotho (11%) or English (12%)<sup>18</sup>; 98% of whom were African; and most of whom were students (60%) or unemployed (24%) – 39% were found to be ‘somewhat familiar with the NQF’, a further 39% were found to be ‘familiar with the NQF’, and 12% were ‘very familiar’. Just over 10% of respondents were ‘not familiar with the NQF’. Most had been exposed to the NQF at career festivals.

## **REDRESS: GETTING PEOPLE INTO THE SYSTEM**

The NQF focused public attention on redress in education and training for the first time in South Africa, and shaped the way in which redress was understood and implemented. The whole system is oriented towards inclusivity<sup>19</sup>. This approach is evident in public funding of the system, in the alternative admission policies of institutions of learning, in the emphasis on student and learner support, and in additional policies and institutions that seek to enhance inclusivity.

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18 South Africa has 11 official languages. The languages spoken by those in the selected sample are spoken by relatively high percentages of people.

19 Inclusivity refers to ethnicity, culture, age, gender, disability, and any other way in which people can differ.

## **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

From the start, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was central for redress. The purpose of RPL is to ensure that marginalised workers gain recognition for the knowledge and skills acquired through years of experience in workplaces (Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU], 2000), and to enable access and/or progression for all those who have gained knowledge and skills informally or non-formally (SAQA, 2013a; 2015c).

### **Early RPL achievements**

Under the SAQA Act, National RPL Policy (SAQA, 2002) and RPL Criteria and Guidelines (SAQA, 2004) were developed by SAQA with contributions from national and international RPL experts. The RPL process was understood as being generic. It was widely thought possible to recognize the informal and non-formal learning of RPL candidates, in a 'seamless' way. Ad hoc implementation of RPL commenced around the country; considerable RPL initiatives were accomplished in the first decade of NQF implementation (SAQA, 2011b, 2011c). By 2008, an international study (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2009) confirmed that South Africa was one of only five countries in the world with 'islands of excellent practice' with respect to RPL.

### **Recent RPL advancements**

In 2010 SAQA hosted a national workshop to identify and build understanding around the barriers to development of a national RPL system in South Africa. In 2011 the barriers – lack of knowledge of effective RPL delivery models, resourcing RPL, and quality assurance of RPL – were addressed in the follow-up national RPL conference *Building and expanding existing islands of excellent practice*. One of the outputs from this event, the *RPL Resolution and Working Document* (SAQA, 2011), mapped the way forward. The Ministerial RPL Task Team set up thereafter investigated the legal and financial barriers to widespread implementation, and international RPL models. National policy for the implementation of RPL was revised with a representative specialist RPL Reference Group (SAQA, 2013a; 2015c). SAQA oversaw a series of large-scale national RPL initiatives, which opened RPL pathways for over 150,000 potential candidates (SAQA, 2015e-f). Ministerial policy for the coordination and funding of RPL was developed (MHET, 2016b).

SAQA-University of the Western Cape (SAQA-UWC) partnership research towards a maximally inclusive RPL model (Cooper et al 2016) developed an inclusive model that embraced and enabled sectoral differences in RPL. This model includes *counselling* and preparing RPL candidates for the RPL processes; helping candidates to *mediate* the process of using experiential knowledge in formal learning contexts; and providing *candidate feedback* and ways forward.

### Data on RPL achievements

It was voluntary for providers to submit RPL-related data for inclusion in the NLRD up to 2012 and as a result, the NLRD contains only a fraction of the learning achievements obtained via RPL. After publication of the revised national RPL policy (SAQA, 2013a; 2015c), it became a requirement for all education and training providers to submit their RPL data, via the relevant Quality Councils, for uploading into the NLRD. Ministerial Policy for the Coordination and Funding of RPL (MHET, 2016b) now requires that the Quality Councils report to SAQA on a quarterly basis. Work is needed to expand these data. Figure 3 shows trends in the uptake of three unit standards related to RPL practices between 2002 and 2015 – for assessment, moderation, and RPL practices respectively – where completion could be interpreted as suggesting the qualification-holders’ intentions to assess learner achievements via RPL.

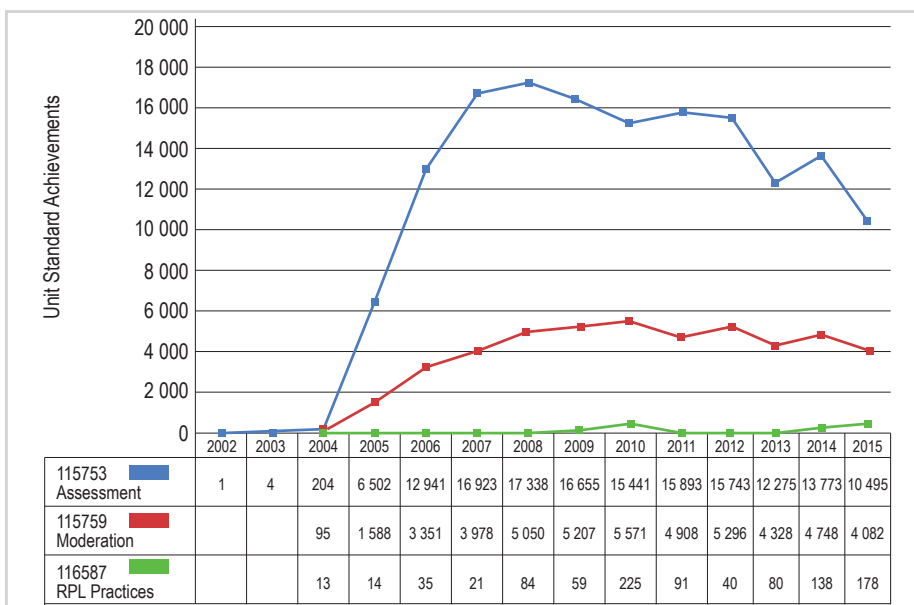


Figure 3: Achievement of Unit Standards relating to RPL, 2002-2015 (Source: NLRD)

## **Adult Education and Training (AET)**

A second major thrust towards inclusivity in the country is the focus on Adult Education and Training (AET). There are at least five million adults in South Africa who have not had opportunities to study in the past, or who do not currently have opportunities to do so. AET (including Popular Education and Worker Education) attempts to address these gaps.

The inclusion of AET qualifications into Umalusi's General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) and the move proposed in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (MHET, 2013) to integrate AET Centres into Community Colleges serve to integrate this usually-neglected sector into the mainstream education and training system. Other recent integration initiatives include the Draft Policy for Community Colleges circulated (MHET, 2014), and the work of the Worker Education Task Team (WETT).

In 2011 and 2012 – the years for which data were readily available (DHET, 2013, 2014) – over half of the *numbers* of learners enrolled for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in schools<sup>20</sup>, were enrolled in AET programmes. Roughly 3% of these learners were in private AET centres; the majority studied in/through public centres.

## **Learnerships, Internships, Skills Programmes**

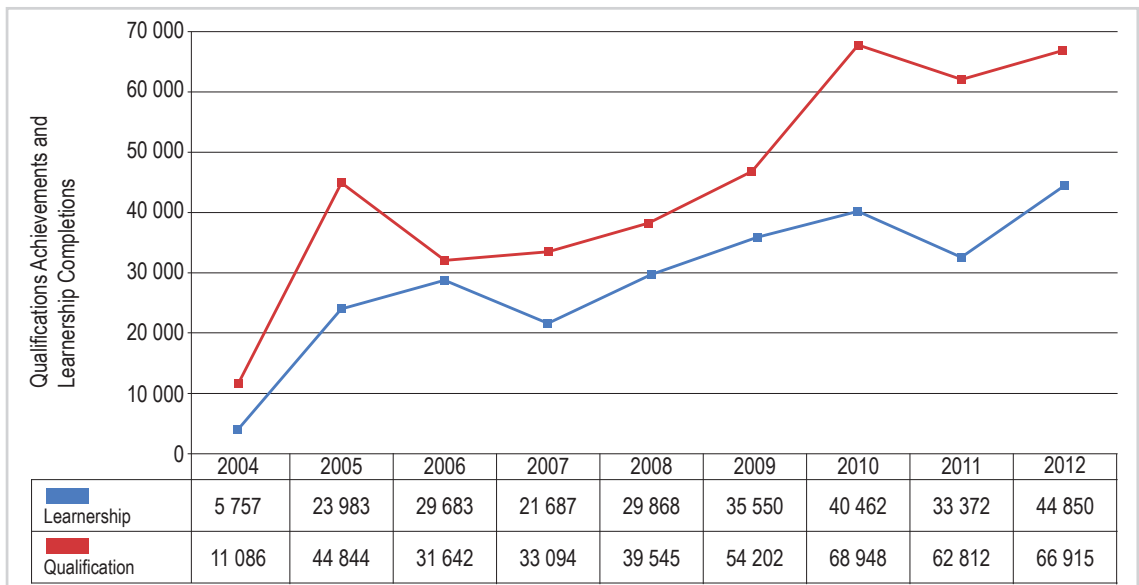
A third inclusivity initiative involves large-scale education and training for workers and unemployed people, in the form of SETA-supported learnerships, internships, and skills programmes<sup>21</sup>. A fourth is the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign that commenced in 2008. There are also Public Works Programmes (PWPs), Extended Public Works Programmes (EPWPs), the community education and training initiatives of Universities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and education and training institutions and offerings that do not yet fit within the NQF.

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20 The NSC is the 12<sup>th</sup> year school-leaving certificate in South Africa.

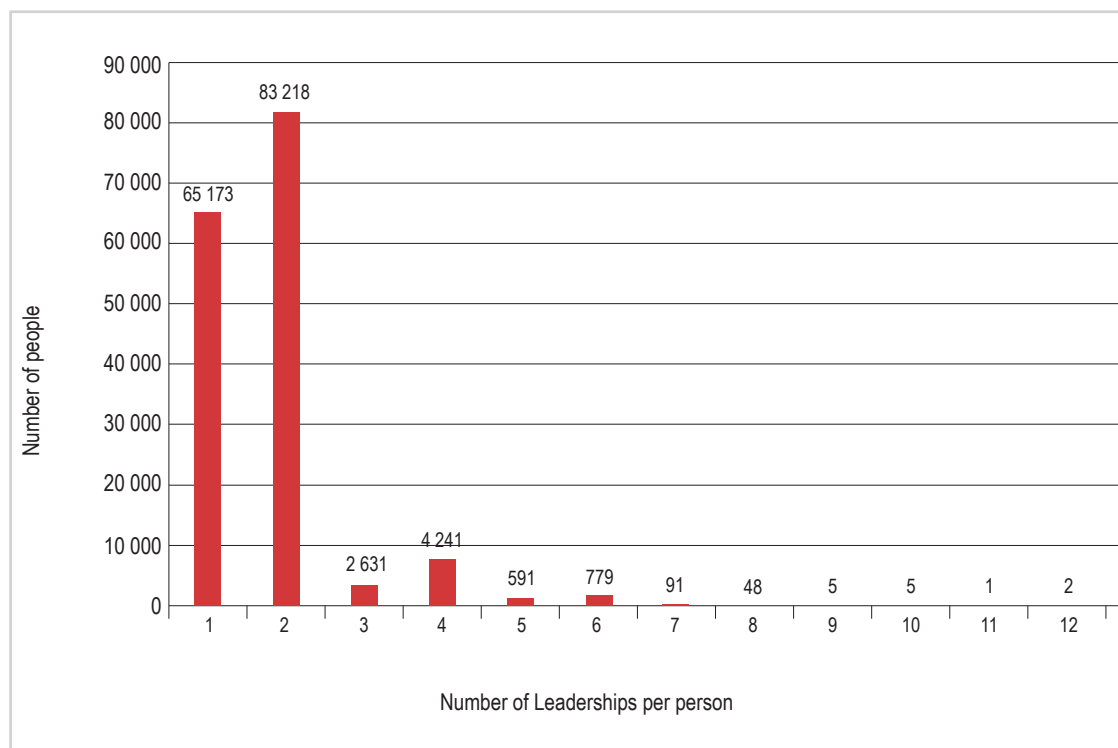
21 The *NQFpedia* defines a skills programme as a part-qualification or 'QCTO-accredited learning programme that is occupationally based and which, when completed, may constitute credits towards a qualification registered on the NQF'. Skills programmes are made up of specified unit standards. They are currently not registered on the NQF, although most SETAs would like them to be, and the MHET has requested that SAQA investigates how to deal with the records of learners' achievements in this arena since the establishment of the NQF.

SETA-supported learnerships, internships, and skills programmes<sup>22</sup> have proved to be much-used alternative ways of accessing the system and progressing within it. Figure 4 shows the numbers of learnerships achieved versus the numbers of occupational qualifications achieved for 2004-2012, the period for which data were readily available. Figure 5 shows the numbers of learnerships completed by individuals in this period: over 65 000 people completed a single learnership; over 80 000 each completed two; fair numbers completed between three and six; two completed 12 learnerships each. More unemployed than working people registered, and received certificates for learnerships in 2011-2012, the years for which data were readily available (DHET, 2013, 2014). Fewer unemployed than working people registered and were certificated for skills programmes, but there were significant numbers of unemployed people (*Ibid.*).



**Figure 4: Comparison of learnership and qualification achievement trends 2004-2012**  
(Source: NLRD)

<sup>22</sup> NQFPedia defines a skills programme as a part-qualification that is a 'QCTO-accredited learning programme that is occupationally based and which, when completed, may constitute credits towards a qualification registered on the NQF'. Skills programmes are made up of logical groups of unit standards which, together, constitute training towards a specific skills set. Skills programmes are currently not registered on the NQF in their own right, although most of the SETAs would like them to be. The Minister of HET has requested that SAQA investigates how to deal with the records of learners' achievements in this arena since the beginning of the NQF. This work is underway, with the assistance of the QCTO.



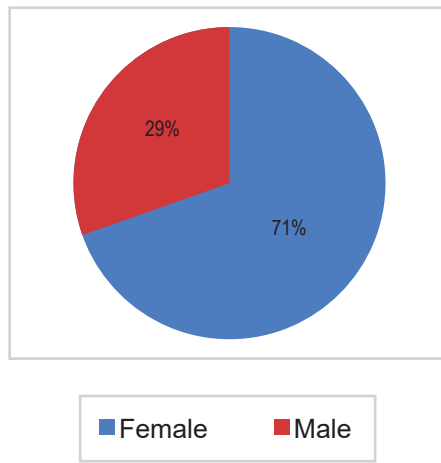
**Figure 5: Numbers of learnerships per person, by how many people have completed this number of learnerships, 2004-2012 (Source: NLRD)**

## ***Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign***

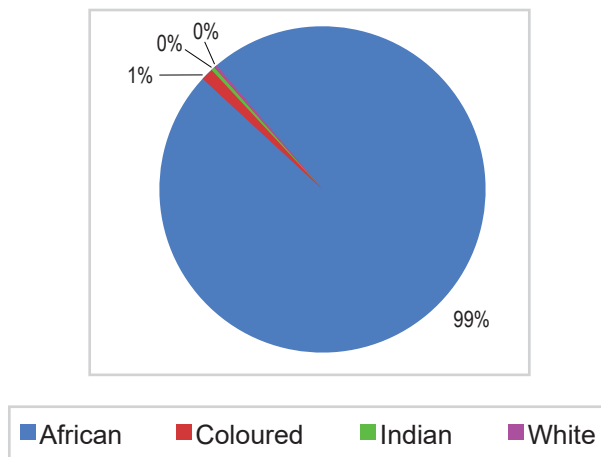
The Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign was launched in 2008 by the national Department of Education. Over 4.7 million people (about 9% of the population in the country) are functionally illiterate or innumerate: Kha Ri Gude was designed to enable anyone interested, to participate. It targets vulnerable groups including women, disabled people, and elderly people; it provides special packs for blind learners, and makes provision for deaf learners; it is operational in rural and urban communities. It is registered at AET Level 1<sup>23</sup>. It focuses on teaching reading, writing and numeracy in the mother tongues of learners, who also learn spoken English. It involves the assessment of around 600 000 completed portfolios per year. The numbers of learner achievements

<sup>23</sup> AET Level 4 is at NQF Level 1.

fluctuate across years but at their highest levels are of the same order of magnitude as the numbers of Grade 12 learners achieving the National Senior Certificate (NSC). Figures 6 and 7 show successful completions of the Kha Ri Gude programme from its inception up to the end of 2014 – the period for which there were audited data – respectively by gender and population group.



**Figure 6: Percentages of learners successfully completing the Kha Ri Gude programme up to the end of 2014, by gender (Source: NLRD)**



**Figure 7: Percentages of learners successfully completing the Kha Ri Gude programme up to the end of 2014, by population group (Source: NLRD)**

## ***Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision (FLTP)***

Understandings around how to enable deep access to knowledge and skills, and continued learning over and above initial *physical* access, when learners ‘stop in and out’ of education and training institutions due to the realities of adult life – have been developed in recent SAQA-University of the Western Cape (UWC) partnership research into flexible provision and lifelong learning (Jones and Walters, 2015; SAQA-UWC, 2015a-b; Walters and Daniels, 2015; Walters et al 2015; Abrahams, 2014).

## **CONTRIBUTING TO INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Snapshots of learner access, progression, and success data show the trends obtained in the context of, although not necessarily being the direct result of, the NQF in South Africa (SAQA, 2015a).

### ***Access to, and progression in, schooling***

A single database with information on learner enrolments in schooling, learner numbers per school grade, and learner achievements in national tests and examinations at school level, has been achieved. Some of the trends in the data follow the desired directions; other trends require additional work towards the goals desired.

#### **Learner enrolments**

While there are 12 years of compulsory schooling in South Africa, attending one or more years of pre-school (Grade R) in addition, is strongly encouraged. By 2013, the year for which data were available, three-quarters of the pre-school-aged cohort in the general population was enrolled at Grade R level (DoE, 2008a, 2008b; DBE, 2014a, 2014b). While there was over-subscription in Grade 1, suggesting that learners had been ‘held back’ from progressing, by Grade 12, only 50-58% of the age-cohort in the general population was at school.

## **Learner achievements in the first nine years of schooling**

In 2012 the Department of Basic Education (DBE) instituted Annual National Assessments (ANA) for learners in Grades 1-6 and 9 in public and state-subsidised independent schools (DBE, 2012d; 2013a-c; 2014a-b). This initiative was one of a range of actions taken in response to the high attrition rates of learners at various points in the school system. The idea was to assess levels of learner competence in literacy and numeracy annually, and to use the ANA results to identify and address gaps before learners exited the system or started to struggle with preparation for the National Senior Certificate (School Grades 10-12). From 2013 a 'Verification Stream' of tests was run in selected schools alongside the 'General Stream' which all schools received, to assess the reliability of the results of the General Stream<sup>24</sup>.

While learner achievement in these tests started from a low base, there have been some improvements. Gathering related data according to the social class of the learners has made possible the planning and implementation of targeted interventions.

## **Learner achievements in the final year of secondary school**

Across the years 2008-2013 – the years under the NQF Act for which data were readily available – between 511 000 and 590 000 learners registered to write the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exams, with numbers fluctuating slightly (DBE, 2010a,b; 2011a-c; 2012a,b,c,e; 2013a,b,c; 2014a,b; 2015a,b). Around 18% more learners were studying part-time in 2013, than in 2008. Pass rates generally increased in this period, from 58% to 62% (*Ibid.*). The numbers of learners writing Mathematics generally dropped across these years – by 20% - while the numbers writing Mathematical Literacy increased, with the overall pass rates increasing for both subjects (*Ibid.*).

## ***Learner access and progression in the TVET College sector***

The TVET sector has seen the most radical reform of all the sectors in the South African NQF. Developments in this sector were considered via five snapshots available – each obtained through analysis of DHET publications of related data, or SAQA partnership research (SAQA, 2015a:146-169).

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<sup>24</sup> The Verification Stream tests were the same as those in the General Stream, but were administered and marked by an independent team, whereas the ANA in the General Stream were marked by the teachers of the learners involved.

Highlights include that since 2009, the numbers of learners registered annually to write the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) exams on one hand, and the N1-6<sup>25</sup> exams on the other, have been roughly of the same order of magnitude as those writing the National Senior Certificate (NSC) exams in schools. There were steep drops between the numbers of learners registering to write NCV and N exams, with each successive increase in qualification level, but the pass rates and levels of learner achievement rose considerably with each successive level. Learner pass rates at different TVET Colleges differed widely in the year for which these data were available for analysis (2008), pointing to the need to study and disseminate the teaching and practices at the highly successful Colleges, more widely.

### ***Redress and student access, success, and progression in Higher Education***

The Higher Education data were drawn from the Vital Stats publications produced annually by the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015), and analyses of data in the NLRD. Highlights include the following.

- In 2005-2013 there were *increases in student enrolments* for undergraduate and post-graduate studies in HEI, in the region of 25% and 35% respectively, with the percentages of students enrolling for *all types of HEI* increasing. Graduation rates were lower than desired, but there were *steady increases in the percentages of students graduating* at under- and post-graduate levels.
- *Population group differences* between the proportions of students entering and graduating from HEI relative to proportions of groups in the general population decreased across 2005-2013. The percentages of graduations increased with the NQF levels of the qualifications, up to Honours Degree level, and population group differences decreased as the number of years taken for completion increased.
- For *graduations by mode of delivery* (contact versus distance) in 2005-

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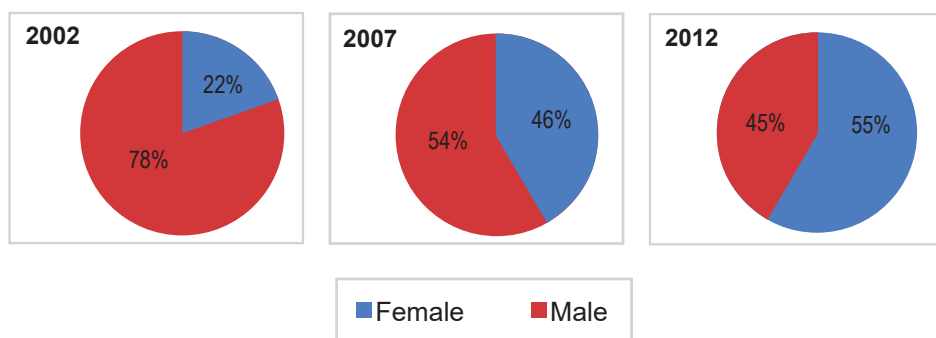
25 The National (N) TVET courses preceded the NCV, but were retained due to popular demand. The N-courses are made up of theoretical, practical, and workplace experience components, while the NCV qualification has a more general vocational orientation.

2013, the *numbers* of all except White students graduating via contact modes increased; the percentages of students graduating via contact modes dropped for all population groups, apart from African students. The percentages of students from all population groups graduating via distance modes increased for students from all population groups, apart from African students.

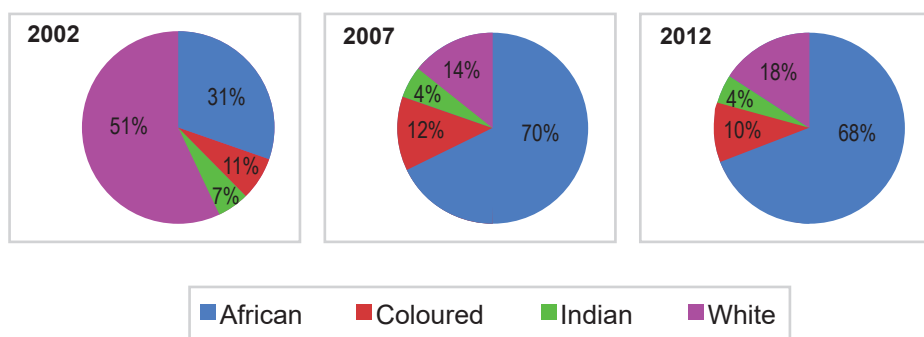
- Comparing the 1994, 2003, and 2012 snapshots of the total numbers of student achievements via *public HEI* recorded in the NLRD, shows an increase of records for female students from 50%-61%, and for African, Coloured and Indian students combined, from 43%-76%. For *private HEI*, the records for female students shifted from 51%-49% between 1999 and 2013, and the records for African, Coloured and Indian students combined, from 72% to 59%.

### ***Redress, access and success in the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context***

The NLRD contains detailed data on learner enrolments and achievements for occupational qualifications and part-qualifications. Fluctuations in the trends are linked to events in particular occupational sub-fields, such as particular training initiatives linked to national programmes or national events and initiatives like the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the Strategic Infrastructure Projects (SIPs), and others. Achievement trends by gender and by population group show redress (see Figures 8 and 9). More systematic recording of data on artisan training is needed.



**Figure 8: Snapshots of achievements of occupational qualifications by gender 2002, 2007, 2012 (Source: NLRD)**



**Figure 9: Snapshots of achievements of occupational qualifications by population group in 2002, 2007, and 2012 (Source: NLRD)**

## EXPANDED COUNTRY LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

South Africa has been through several cycles of what Engstrom (2001) describes as ‘expanded learning for transformation’. One such cycle is visible in the introduction of the SAQA Act, its review, ongoing contestation and the development and implementation of legislation to enable negotiation around the conflicting approaches, modelling a new way forward in the form of the Joint Policy Statement (DoE-DoL, 2007), designing and implementing a new model in the form of the NQF Act, and consolidating the new model. Engstrom’s (2001) ‘seven steps’ of action and reflection were followed in the process, over a period of 20 years. Another example is provided by the national RPL developments described in this paper – in this instance the transformation cycle took six years. By consciously seeking to follow the seven steps in future instances, it may be possible to reduce the time needed to complete the transformation cycle.

## NQF PRIORITIES FOR THE IMMEDIATE AND MEDIUM TERMS

In the five years since the promulgation of the NQF Act, SAQA developed the suite of policies needed to implement the NQF, and has collaborated with the Quality Councils in the development of their related Sub-Framework-specific policies, some of which are still in the process of being finalised. Also after collaboration, and based on Quality Council-proposals, the three articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks were determined by the Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET). The current focus for the key NQF partner organisations is on the universal implementation of NQF policy. The vision for the system was drafted in detail in the Green Paper for Post-School Education

and Training (MHET, 2012), and after wide consultation, published in its White Paper counterpart (MHET, 2013).

In the White Paper (*Op.Cit.:70*), the Minister states that “The implementation of changes which have recently been made to support the NQF will be supported and no further substantial changes will be made”. The three NQF Sub-Frameworks will remain; SAQA will continue to provide guidance and leadership of NQF implementation and further development; where barriers remain, they will be addressed. SAQA’s role is to take the form of ‘harmonising’ and ‘coordinating’ (MHET, 2013:72).

### ***Simplification, flexibility, articulation, RPL***

The simplification of the NQF is a priority (MHET, 2013:70): there will be a concerted effort to control the proliferation of qualifications; simplify NQF-related processes; make problematic learning pathways work, and make them known; demystify terminology to make it more accessible, and systematically feed insights gained from research and practice, into further NQF development. Well-used part-qualifications that can be used for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) need to be recognized, and the flexibility and responsiveness of the system need to be increased, in order to make it less restrictive (*Ibid.*).

It is recognized that “articulation across the post-school system is poor” (*Op.Cit.*). In developing a more strongly articulated system institutions are urged to “make every effort to avoid unfair and irrational barriers to acceptance and credit transfer”, and SAQA is to consider playing a role in supporting students who feel that they have unfairly been denied access or where credit has unfairly not been recognized (*Op.Cit.*). This role could for example take the form of an Articulation Ombud. Career guidance and communication strategies are also important. The Draft Articulation Framework (MHET, 2016a) was released recently, to support this work.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) remains a key mechanism for redressing past injustices, and recognising competences gained informally and non-formally (*Op.Cit.:73-4*). While SAQA oversees the implementation of RPL in the NQF Sub-Framework contexts, the Minister recently released policy for the national coordination and funding of RPL towards the establishment of a national RPL system (MHET, 2016b).

## ***Effectiveness, efficiency, economy***

In line with the required routine cycles of evaluations, the NQF Act is currently being evaluated by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the South African Presidency. The focus of this evaluation is on the *effectiveness* of the NQF Act to achieve its goals, the *efficiency* of its related processes, and its *economy* (uses of its funds) – characterising the study as an *implementation* evaluation.

## ***Enhancing coordination and the combating of fraud***

A NQF Amendment Bill (RSA, Forthcoming) is imminent, in which SAQA is given a stronger coordinating role than is currently the case. Under the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995), standard setting and quality assurance were centralised, and as such, met with resistance. Under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), SAQA consults with the Quality Councils before developing policy, encourages collaboration, is mandated to play a role in the settling of disputes between the Quality Councils, and advises the MHET. It is likely that under the NQF Amendment Act, the Quality Councils will be required to report regularly to SAQA regarding progress in RPL, CAT, and articulation in general, in their Sub-Framework contexts. SAQA will in turn produce an over-arching report on these matters, to the MHET.

SAQA's role in the combating of fraud is also likely to be strengthened in the NQF Amendment Bill. The current Ministerial Guidelines for SAQA and Quality Council work already require regular submission to the Ministry from SAQA, of Fraud Registers detailing individuals and organisations which have misrepresented NQF-related information in some way. Thirdly, the conceptual distinctions between occupational and vocational qualifications need to be clarified. A fourth priority is going to be to develop a separate register of recognized professional designations which are currently just listed on the NQF.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

This paper sought to sketch NQF-related achievements in South Africa. It shows where progress has been achieved, and points to work that remains to be done.

There have been major shifts in understanding and transformation in education and training, over the past 20 years. A single national system has been achieved, to which

access is open to all. At policy level, different types of qualifications share parity of esteem. Professional bodies with their professional designations, and the evaluation of, and learning and work pathways relating to, foreign qualifications, have been integrated into the system. In addition to being fair and inclusive, data and information about the NQF; NQF policies and processes, and the findings from NQF-related research conducted are made accessible and disseminated widely: a high degree of transparency has been achieved in the system. Strong inroads have been made towards addressing illiteracy in the country, establishing a national RPL system, understanding the nature of the articulation needed, and contributing to individual work and learning pathways.

Current priorities include continuing to strengthen quality, flexibility, coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, and economy throughout the system, and to simplify the NQF. The national coordination and funding of RPL are key priorities. Finally, strengthening learning pathways and articulation in general, is central to NQF development going forward. This work includes but is not limited to establishing a baseline of articulation initiatives from which progress can be measured, and expanding good RPL, CAT, and other articulation practices to ensure a fully articulated system. This includes a stronger coordinating role for SAQA, which may include an Articulation Ombud function.

Given the different NQF partners and Sub-Framework contexts – with their differing histories, motivations, ways of doing, and voices – it is highly probable that the NQF will remain a site of contestation. It is therefore imperative that all of the role-players strive to develop relational agency – the ability understand each other's traditions, motives, and thinking, and to build on this shared understanding – in the interests of developing a learning country.

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**LOCATING QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS  
IN THE GLOBAL ARENA**



# Qualifications Frameworks within the New Global Framework for 2030

Mr Borhene Chakroun<sup>26</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper starts by focussing on the major trends impacting n Qualifications Frameworks (QFs). It is not possible to speak about QFs without putting them into a broader context which includes the drivers that support or trigger changes in labour markets, education and training, economies and society in general. This-e paper touches on the sustainable development agenda, its objectives and indications and what qualifications mean in and for this agenda. It reflects on signals that are appearing, and on some major shifts that will have to be considered in the future. The paper considers what the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is trying to do in this context, and calls for collaboration in this regard. It touches on the major trends, some of which are global but have local roots, depending on the countries and the regions involved. The reader is requested to keep in mind that labour market structures are changing – they are shifting focus from the agricultural industry to services – and that these shifts have an impact on the types of qualifications needed in different sectors. There is a need for mindfulness around what qualifications and qualifications frameworks can contribute to economic development, and *vice versa*.

## FACTORS IMPACTING ON QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

There are a number of factors impacting on QFs; each of these needs to be considered in qualification framework implementation and further development.

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<sup>26</sup> This paper was developed by Ms Tshidi Leso and Dr Heidi Bolton of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), on the basis of the presentation delivered by Mr Borhene Chakroun of UNESCO, at the SAQA-hosted International Seminar: Qualifications Frameworks – Agenda Towards 2030 held on 20 May 2016 in Cape Town, South Africa.

## ***Labour market polarisation, migration mobility***

UNESCO promotes solidarity across regions, but there is a lot of competition between these regions and there are indications to show the polarisation of the labour markets. This polarisation has implications for the types of qualifications being considered, and those that will be needed in the future. In addition, the potential for automation and the digitisation of economies are increasing; these trends also have implications for the polarisation of the labour markets and for high-end and low-end skills in particular. Further, the International Organisation for Migration shows that the migration mobility (the numbers and flow of people) within and across regions has shown an overall increase, and that it is higher in the South than it is in the North. These realities will impact on QFs and 'recognition technology' in general.

## ***Youth unemployment***

One of the indicators used to measure the impact of QFs is that of youth employment. Unfortunately, the situation of youth unemployment is not improving over time; it is getting worse. It is generally known that in some regions such as the Middle East and North Africa, the youth unemployment situations are at critical stages. Youth unemployment impacts on how the policy makers in countries view QFs, and whether or not these mechanisms are seen as being solutions for addressing the unemployment levels.

## ***Climate change***

Climate change is another factor impacting on world systems. There have been, and likely to continue to be, many natural disasters – environmental vulnerability is a reality across many countries. In the Asia-Pacific alone for example, there have recently been over 1300 disasters, with over 300,000 people killed, 1.4 million affected and \$429 billion worth of damage. This kind of disaster has a considerable impact on the economies and societies involved, and on across-country trends. It also impacts heavily on how qualifications are understood, and on what is expected from QFs.

The world is experiencing a situation where economic growth is not creating jobs, youth unemployment is not improving and the climate change affects everyone. Of course the situation is not the same across all regions – some regions are faring more successfully

than others. These factors need to be taken into consideration however, when discussing qualifications frameworks.

## ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***

There are 17 goals for sustainable development in the UNESCO 2030 agenda. One of the key goals crucial for achieving the other goals is that which aims to ensure the quality of education and training and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. This is the ambition set for the next 15 years. The other goals range from ending poverty to addressing climate-related, infrastructure-related and technology-related issues. An important question to consider is that of how education and training qualifications can contribute to achieving these objectives.

The 2030 education and training agenda is a comprehensive and holistic one. It aims to be transformative and leave no-one behind. This goal is a very important and aspirational one. It tries to address unfinished business but also sets the objectives for the future. Education and training are also part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and United Nations (UN) goals; the UN considers education and training to be a human right. The key elements of UNESCO's education and training-related goals are equal access, quality, and relevance, but the goals are also about contributing to sustainable development. Education and training/vocational skills and how these link with the world of work are items high on the development agenda. There are three targets for vocational skills alone: never before have vocational skills been so central, relevant and crucial in achieving sustainable development – and this focus has implications for qualifications frameworks.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS; INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPACT**

In many instances, policy attention has been more centred on the economic dimension, in other words on how vocational skills can contribute to productivity, employability and new modes of work, than the other way around. The same approach has been the case for qualification frameworks, where the focus has been on how these frameworks can contribute to economic development. There are however several indications that attention has also been directed towards social equity.

In Europe, roughly 70 million people could currently be categorised as having low skills levels; there are around 740 million illiterate persons in the world; there are more than one billion poor people. The links between poverty, skills, and work, and the importance of advancing skills and work to eradicate poverty, are generally known.

Thus, when attempting to measure the impact of QFs, the social equity dimensions as well as the climate change/contributions to sustainability, need to be considered. In other words, QFs will have to look at measuring impact around all of these elements.

Looking at international experience, over ten key education and training-related reforms have been undertaken across the world. QFs are important elements in these initiatives, but they are not the only elements. An important question is not only: What impact are QFs having? But also: How are QFs as policy measures linked with other policy initiatives? Not much is known about the links between QF-related policies and other policies; what the various interactions are, and how they could support each other; and what is to be learned from international experience. The relationship between working to enhance QFs and working to enhance the responsiveness of education and training provision, also need to be considered.

Another important shift to consider is the relationship between QF development and broader sustainable development. For example: What are QFs contributing to water-related issues, healthy workforces, green economies and gender equality? All of these are sustainable development goals. If a country is experiencing water-related issues and its people do not have water – how can the QF in that country contribute to sustainable development? The links between QFs and their responsiveness to local, national and regional concerns need to be considered.

## **USING LEARNING OUTCOMES DIFFERENTLY**

Learning outcomes are cross-cutting concerns in the Education 2030 agenda and the development agenda in general, and in QFs, but the idea of ‘learning outcomes’ is not necessarily viewed in the same way across these contexts. In the QF context, learning outcomes are about specifying the expected results of learning. They are also considered to be tools for measuring learning performance. In the broader developmental context, learning outcomes signal an important shift from access to outcomes.

What is of importance, is *how* to use learning outcomes to measure performance and how the achievement of learning outcomes can be used to measure the performance in different cycles or of entities at different levels in the education and training system. Learning outcomes are not only the outcomes of processes. They are presented as drivers for the recognition of learning, which is not a new practice. The plan is also to use them as tools for comparison across systems. UNESCO is developing a new index, the Learning Assessment Capacity Index that could be used to evaluate the achievement of learning outcomes across countries in the future. The point is that learning outcomes are becoming crucial not only as outcomes of teaching and learning *within* contexts, but also as levers for monitoring and evaluation at differing levels in systems, and for comparing and measuring performance across contexts. This view represents a shift in how learning outcomes can be viewed, as opposed to how they have been viewed historically.

There is increasing development around the communication of learning outcomes and achievements. Learners' access to this kind of information is becoming an important element in discussion in general, but also in terms of facilitating mobility and progression in learning and work. The issue of 'passports' is also part of this discussion – in different parts of the world for example, there are different skills passports, such as 'entrepreneurship skills passports' and 'sports skills passports'. These passports bring in the idea that people possess more than just qualifications – they possess knowledge, skills and experience over and above qualifications. There is a shift, moving away from the importance of 'qualifications only', towards 'qualifications plus', and the passports are examples of representing this 'broader skills capital'. This kind of 'capital' goes beyond QFs, and the frameworks community will have to consider that.

## **QUALIFICATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS**

There are a few qualifications-related elements that need to be highlighted. Firstly, it is important to include a variety of qualifications in QFs, to accommodate the range of learning desires and pathways that exist. Work has commenced on typologies of qualifications, which will be useful for incorporating variety in frameworks.

Secondly, because of the nature of learning, qualifications need to recognise a wide range of types of learning, including informal, non-formal and experiential learning obtained outside formal learning contexts and in the course of social life. Is it possible

to accommodate wider learning, or is it too ambitious an objective? Countries differ in the extent to which they recognise wider learning.

## DIGITISATION

The digitisation of economies is changing the world economy very quickly. How can qualifications keep up with these changes? To develop a global convention in order to adopt a new recommendation takes at least six to eight years. How can these relatively slow institutional processes match the velocity of the changes in the labour market, the economy and society at large? This consideration is an important one for QFs .

The data revolution is part of the sustainable development agenda and as such it creates at further major challenges for QFs. In addition to the pace of change, a second area of difficulty relates to the complementarity of digital and analogue foundations. The example of the Groningen Declaration<sup>27</sup> shows that the technology exists for connecting individuals/institutions with different databases, but that the competition around the technologies and conceptualisations to be used by all is very fierce. When parties are not familiar with technologies, issues of lack of trust arise around quality assurance and the learning outcomes to be used, including how the outcomes were developed, and who contributed to their development. These issues need to be addressed at the start of, and in all of the processes relating to, joint initiatives.

Credentials and records of learning have been digitised, and learners' records databases have been integrated: there are clear examples of this work from all over the world – in the United States of America (USA), Europe, China, Australia, Africa and elsewhere. There is thus progress towards a global system, but the challenge remains regarding the inter-operability between systems. How are systems able to 'speak to each other'? How best to match the systems with the labour market? Is there going to be a mega-system or will there be different systems that cannot communicate? Inter-operability is an important issue when digitising qualifications and QF processes.

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27 The Groningen Declaration seeks common ground in serving the academic and professional mobility needs of citizens world-wide by bringing together key stakeholders in the Digital Student Data Ecosystem. The Groningen Declaration Network aims to make Digital Student Data Portability possible, and to enable citizens across the world to consult and share their authentic educational data with whomever they want, when they want to do so.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance in and of systems is of crucial importance. Decisions need to be taken as to whether or not traditional quality assurance systems are to be used, or whether innovative quality assurance mechanisms are needed. Ways of developing trust need to be explored. Is trust going to be achieved through bureaucracy, peer-groups, communities of professional practice, or in other ways? Authentic quality assurance needs to be the focus, rather than merely following existing bureaucratic processes.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

### *On polarisation and access*

It is emphasised that the polarisation of the labour market is of central importance, although consideration of these patterns has been through reflection rather than a result of clear-cut statements or writings. There are indications that there will be high and increasing numbers of people who are low-skilled, and at the same time high and increasing numbers who are high-skilled, while simultaneously the numbers of those with intermediate skills-levels are shrinking. The tempo for this shrinkage may differ across different parts of the world but the trends have been generally visible across research conducted in the last two years by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

These labour market realities have implications for the kinds of qualifications needed, and for qualifications frameworks. There are implications for how the skills of the low-skilled group are recognised. Is progression possible in the polarised labour market? This difficult question presents a big challenge. From a pessimistic perspective people on the lower end of the scale could find it difficult to progress further and there is a possibility that they would experience barriers that would keep them at that lower end. Care needs to be taken to develop recognition and progression instruments that would enable people in this group to further their learning and progress in their learning and work pathways. Some useful questions are: How are qualifications responding to these challenges? Which qualifications will be important and how will they be developed over time?

## ***On UNESCO initiatives***

It is worth highlighting a number of related areas that UNESCO is working on. First, UNESCO has adopted a new recommendation on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), where the issue of its positioning in qualifications frameworks and learning pathways is high on the agenda. UNESCO is updating the Regional Conventions on Higher Education, and the Addis Convention, and is developing a Global Convention on Higher Education, to this end. Secondly, UNESCO has normative instruments on the Right to Education and is working on different guidelines that support the qualification reforms, quality assurance and other elements. Third, UNESCO is working with its stakeholders to advance national and regional agendas regarding QFs – the vision being to support mobility across borders and develop a tool that can assist this mobility and the boundary-crossing needed. Guidelines are being developed around the quality assurance of qualifications – towards representing the diverse features involved and helping the stakeholders and countries to capture and enhance the wider learning described in this paper.

## ***Closing comments***

In closing, attention is called to the opportunity to leverage the momentum that has been created by the Education 2030 agenda, and to reinforce all of the partnerships involved in order to enlist the potential of the QFs to contribute to this agenda. It is known that the QFs have the potential needed, and that given the new context and new challenges, the question on which the QFs communities need to focus, is: How can this potential be unleashed in order to align the QFs appropriately with the other policy measures relating to the developmental agenda?

# Exploring the Measurability of the Contributions of Qualifications Frameworks to the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and its Associated Targets

*Mr Jens Bjornavold*

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## INTRODUCTION: THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVENTION

Increasingly, as Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) are introduced all over the world, the questions around their impact and added value have to be asked: Do these frameworks, operating at sector, national and regional levels, make a difference to education and training (and employment) policies and practices and to the individual learners and citizens they are supposed to benefit?

We are all aware of the high expectations expressed in relation to the setting up and development of QFs but are these rooted in realities? The question of impact is closely related to the challenges associated with measuring the impact of QFs: Which methods can be used for measuring impact? What could be the reference points for measurements? Is it possible to identify the different ways in which QFs impact in contexts where they inevitably interact and compete with other instruments and initiatives? And how should the political character of QFs be addressed? How can the critical issues related to trust and conflict be addressed? These questions have been asked within the communities of all the mature, 'first generation', QFs established during the 1980s and 1990s, including the South African QF.

Many of the QF reforms observed over the years have responded to critical questions regarding impact and relevance. Increasingly it can be observed that similar questions are being asked of the new QFs set up during the last decade. These new frameworks, vastly outnumbering the 'early starters', now have to prove their added value in order to avoid irrelevance and to survive. I have been asked to reflect on the measurability of QFs and in particular to discuss whether frameworks can be used to support the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education and lifelong learning. This issue

will be addressed briefly towards the end of this paper, but I will hone in on the challenge of impact measurement by looking at European QF developments during the last decade (basically since the introduction of the European Qualifications Framework [EQF]); the key question is whether and how impact can be identified?

## **NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS: DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE**

In the 39 countries currently cooperating on the EQF<sup>28</sup>, a total of 43 National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have been established. In addition to strengthening the transparency and comparability of qualifications at European level, these frameworks are now playing an increasingly important role at national level.

At the start of 2016, QFs in 23 countries had reached an operational stage (compared to 18 countries in 2014). These can be divided into two main categories: 17 countries<sup>29</sup> have fully operational frameworks, namely: Belgium, Czech Republic (partial QF for Vocational Education and Training [VET]), Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK). This is a significant increase since 2014 when only seven countries belonged to this category<sup>30</sup>. Reaching a fully operational stage means that:

- the conceptual and technical design and development stage has been concluded;
- legal adoption has been successfully completed;
- the framework includes all and/or a significant proportion of the qualifications addressed by the framework; and
- the framework is visible and accessible to all main stakeholders and to the general public, for example through qualifications databases and the inclusion of levels in qualifications documents and Europass supplements.

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28 In addition to the 28 European Union (EU) Member States, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYROM, Iceland, Kosovo, Lichtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey take part in this cooperation.

29 These 17 countries have 21 different frameworks, including the three regions of Belgium (with separate frameworks for Flanders, Wallonia and the German-speaking community) and three UK nations (England/Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

30 Analysis and overview of national qualifications frameworks developments in European countries, annual report, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6127>, May 2016.

While the overall implementation (for example the coverage of qualifications) in these frameworks still varies, all countries with fully operational NQFs now provide learning outcomes-based maps of national qualifications, aiming at increased transparency, comparability and permeability. Some of these frameworks take on a regulatory (France) or reform (Iceland, Portugal) role and directly influence the way standards are set, curricula are designed and teaching and training practices integrate the shift to learning outcomes.

It is estimated that six countries (Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Montenegro, Slovakia and Turkey) have reached an early operational stage. These countries have completed the initial design and adoption of their frameworks. As their practical implementation is still ongoing, the benefits and visibility of the frameworks for end-users are still limited.

Three countries are currently waiting for formal legal adoption of their frameworks (Finland, Hungary and Spain). While these countries have completed the initial technical and conceptual design, the lack of a legal and political mandate prevents them from implementing their frameworks. The remaining countries taking part in the EQF cooperation, mostly those having joined in the last two years (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYROM, Kosovo and Serbia), are still working on the designs and (to some extent) the formal adoption of their NQFs. Italian stakeholders have agreed on the roadmap for setting up an NQF, including national and regional qualifications by June 2016.

## **SUSTAINABILITY AND VISIBILITY: PRE-CONDITIONS FOR IMPACT**

In a survey carried out by European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) in November 2015<sup>31</sup>, countries were asked to respond to two key questions regarding the current and emerging roles of NQFs in national education, training and – potentially – employment policies, as follows.

- How sustainable are the NQFs? To what extent have QFs become permanent features of national qualifications systems and to what extent are they making an impact on policies and practices?
- How visible have the NQFs become? Are learners, parents and employers, *etcetera* aware of the frameworks and are they benefitting from them when pursuing learning or employment?

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31 All 39 countries taking part in the EQF cooperation were invited to respond to the survey, which refers to 2014.

## **Sustainability**

The 2015 CEDEFOP survey (*Ibid.*) provides some insights as to the political and practical sustainability of NQFs. The vast majority of countries consider their NQFs to be permanent features of their national qualifications systems. Many argue that a strong legal basis with clear political objectives is essential to guarantee and clarify the future role of the frameworks. The active and committed involvement of stakeholders within and outside the education and training system is also seen as a precondition for and guarantee of sustainability.

A few countries (such as Liechtenstein and Hungary) have expressed doubts as to the future roles of their frameworks. They emphasised the need to clarify and/or strengthen the political mandates underpinning them. Other countries, for example Norway, have pointed out that changing national political priorities may affect such new mechanisms as the NQFs. While the majority of countries are confident that their frameworks will remain in place, some point out that the frameworks' ultimate impact will depend on their integration into mainstream policy processes. Politically and institutionally isolated frameworks will be less able to meet expectations.

Around one-third of countries<sup>32</sup> regard their NQFs as tools for reform. These countries expect that NQFs will help to restructure, strengthen and/or regulate their national qualifications systems. While many countries initially emphasised that NQFs should be used to describe – and not to change – qualifications systems, they now tend to discover their NQFs' reform potential and display an interest in combining both functions<sup>33</sup>. This trend is linked to the shift to learning outcomes and its impact on qualifications standards, curricula, assessment, and teaching and training methods.

The sustainability of the frameworks is mirrored by European countries' financial and human investments in them. CEDEFOP's survey demonstrates that modest however non-negligible resources are being devoted to NQFs. In almost all countries NQF implementation is supported by full-time and permanent staff, normally in a secretariat of two-four experts. In some countries, notably in countries with more mature frameworks, NQF implementation is an integrated function of Ministries or qualification and/

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32 Examples are Belgium (FI), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, FYROM, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovakia and Turkey.

33 Examples are Austria, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Poland.

or quality assurance bodies. Most countries flag the need for financial and human resources to be stepped up when NQFs reach the full operational stage.

## ***Visibility***

Most European NQFs have so far stayed out of sight of the general public. While this is easy to explain – as their initial development required time – there is now pressure for this status to change.

Visibility can be achieved in different ways, for example through national databases and information campaigns. What will make the difference is the inclusion of NQF and EQF levels in the actual qualification documents (certificates and diplomas) issued<sup>34</sup>: this will make the frameworks visible, not only to learners but also to employers. Increasing numbers of countries are moving towards including NQF levels in certificates and diplomas, as the survey shows. While fifteen countries have already gone about it, about another ten have flagged their intention to do so in the near future. Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and Germany are among the countries which have started to award large numbers of qualifications with clear indications of their NQF and EQF levels.

The 2015 survey points to some of the challenges European NQFs face if they are to make difference to policies and practices:

- NQFs need to further promote the use of learning outcomes for the development and review of qualification standards, curricula and assessment;
- countries need to make their NQFs more visible for the general public and to broaden stakeholder involvement, both from the education/training sector and the labour market;
- countries need to integrate better their NQFs into mainstream education, training and employment policies to benefit fully from their potential;
- NQFs need to be closely interlinked with quality assurance policies and practices; and
- NQFs need to integrate better arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. This is critical for the frameworks to make

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<sup>34</sup> This is the reason that the EQF Recommendation invites countries to include a reference to levels in each qualification and certificate document.

a difference regarding lifelong learning, and to add value with respect to career progression.

Based on the results of the 2015 CEDEFOP survey, it can be argued that NQFs are here to stay. Their actual contributions to education and training policies and practices however, still need to be debated and evaluated.

## **EARLY IMPACT OF THE NEW GENERATION OF EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

The regular monitoring of European NQFs carried out by CEDEFOP since 2009, supported a by a variety of comparative research projects covering different aspects relevant to QF developments<sup>35</sup>, points to a limited number of areas where NQFs are starting to make a difference.

### ***Learning outcomes***

European NQFs are mainly connected through their emphases on learning outcomes. Recent research on the shift to learning outcomes (CEDEFOP, forthcoming) shows that this principle has been broadly accepted among European policy-makers and that NQFs have contributed significantly to this shift.

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35 The following NQF/EQF-relevant studies have been carried out by CEDEFOP since the initiation of the EQF process in 2005:

- CEDEFOP. 2005. European Reference Levels for Education and Training: Promoting credit transfer and mutual trust. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/5146>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2009. The shift to learning outcomes: Policies and practices in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office. CEDEFOP Reference Series; 72. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/12900.aspx>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014. Annual NQF monitoring reports analysing national developments, including country chapters (2012 and 2014).
- CEDEFOP. 2010. Changing qualifications: A review of qualifications policies and practices. CEDEFOP Reference Series: 84. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Accessed at [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3059\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3059_en.pdf), May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2015. Short summary of National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe. Anniversary publication. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/4137>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015. Briefing notes on NQFs. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/9064>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2013. Analysis and overview of NQF level descriptors in European countries. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6119>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2014. Qualifications at Level 5: Progressing in a career or to higher education. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6123>, May 2016.
- CEDEFOP. 2016. Application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe (forthcoming).

This research, building on similar work carried out in 2007-2008 (CEDEFOP, 2009), demonstrates that the introduction of NQFs is the most important factor influencing policies in this area: while the learning outcomes approach was previously taken forward in a fragmented way in separate institutions and sub-systems, the emergence of comprehensive frameworks has made it possible to approach the shift to learning outcomes in a more systematic and – to some extent – more consistent way.

In countries like Belgium, Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway and Poland it has been observed that the introduction of frameworks has led to the identification of areas where learning outcomes had not been previously applied or had been used in inconsistent ways. The Norwegian NQF for example, pointed to the lack of learning outcomes-based descriptions and standards for advanced vocational training (*Fagskole*), resulting in work to remedy this weakness.

### ***Stakeholder involvement***

The new generation of European NQFs has helped to bring together stakeholders from different sub-systems in education, training, and work – stakeholders who were not accustomed to collaborating with each other. Experiences reported so far are mostly positive, and countries have signalled that they want to continue these collaborations and if possible, institutionalise the collaborative processes. A key question now is: Can these initial successes be turned into permanent features of the frameworks? While the initial developmental stage has been limited in terms of time and scope, the long term implementation of frameworks with this kind of joint work would require different and stronger commitments, especially from stakeholders located in the labour markets.

### ***Impact of NQFs on institutional reform***

In a limited number of cases NQFs are contributing to institutional reform. The frameworks in Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Romania exemplify this through their decisions to merge existing and multiple qualifications bodies into entities that work with different types and levels of qualifications. Some other countries also have plans to merge qualifications authorities or to establish new institutions – a proposal for a national qualifications council has been put forward in Sweden for example. All of these initiatives show that comprehensive NQFs, even in cases where their main role is perceived to be the promotion of transparency, can trigger institutional reform.

## ***Bridging institutions and sub-systems***

Several countries see their NQFs as tools for strengthening the links between the education and training sub-systems. This bridging role is considered to be essential for improving the permeability of boundaries or reducing barriers to progression in education, training and work. The new generation of European NQFs is mostly made up of comprehensive frameworks that include all types of qualifications at all levels. They seek – through their descriptors – to be relevant for a diverse range of institutions with different traditions and cultures. It is generally too early to say whether or not the NQFs are making a difference in this respect – only time will tell.

## ***Developing and renewing qualifications***

The introduction of comprehensive NQFs has added value by making visible, overviews of systems. Further, the use of learning outcomes-based NQF levels and the placing of qualifications on these levels makes it possible to identify gaps in learning pathways and the existing provision of qualifications. CEDEFOP's (2014) study<sup>36</sup> shows that EQF Level 5 and the relevant NQF levels have been used as platforms for the development of new qualifications. This development is exemplified in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and the UK.

## ***Opening up to the private and non-formal sectors***

The majority of the new NQFs have limited their coverage to the formal qualifications awarded either by national authorities or independent bodies accredited by these authorities. In practice, this means that frameworks mainly include the initial qualifications offered by public education and training institutions. While there are exceptions to this pattern, most of the NQFs fail to include qualifications based on learning in the non-formal and private sectors. One of the challenges in this regard is that important qualifications linked to continuing and further education and training are left out. Since 2011-2012, attention has increasingly been paid to this potential weakness in the scopes of frameworks. Some countries – such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – have started to work on procedures for including non-formal and private sector qualifications and certificates.

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36 CEDEFOP. 2014. Qualifications at Level 5: Progressing in a career or to higher education. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/6123>, May 2016.

## ***Recognition of qualifications***

The effect of QFs on the mobility and progression of learners and workers in systems for education, training and work is not yet fully understood<sup>37</sup>. Full implementation of the frameworks has yet to be achieved; in the European context, referencing to the EQF has yet to be finalised.

NQFs have however provided links to detailed information about qualifications, including about the qualification type, the associated learning outcomes, and the workload involved. These features play an important role in the recognition of qualifications across countries and systems, as expressed in the subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>38</sup>. This text requires that frameworks be used systematically as sources of information that support recognition decisions.

## ***Validation of non-formal and informal learning***

The Recommendations for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, CEDEFOP, ICF International, 2012<sup>39</sup>) refer to NQFs as being essential in validation arrangements across Europe. NQFs and validation are linked through their shared emphasis on learning outcomes. The 2012 recommendations state that for validation, the same or equivalent learning outcomes-based standards used in formal education, should be used when recognising non-formal learning. That NQFs provide common reference points for learning acquired both within and outside formal institutions of learning is confirmed in the 2014 update of the European Inventory on Validation<sup>40</sup>.

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37 European Commission and GHK. 2013. Evaluation of the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework Recommendations. Accessed at <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-efq/files/DG%20EAC%20-%20Evaluation%20EQF%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20Final%20Version.pdf>, May 2016.

38 See Subsidiarity Text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention: 'Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications.' Accessed at [http://www.cicic.ca/docs/lisboa/Recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_use\\_of\\_qualifications\\_frameworks\\_in\\_the\\_recognition\\_of\\_foreign\\_qualifications.pdf](http://www.cicic.ca/docs/lisboa/Recommendation_on_the_use_of_qualifications_frameworks_in_the_recognition_of_foreign_qualifications.pdf), May 2016.


39 European Commission; CEDEFOP; ICF International. 2014. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: 2014 update. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>, May 2016.

40 European Commission; CEDEFOP; ICF International. 2014. European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning: 2014 update: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning/european-inventory>.

## **Qualifications frameworks: communication and transformation**

The majority of the current European NQFs were originally seen as being tools for increasing transparency in education and training, and as mechanisms for describing systems more clearly, and promoting them. These modest ambitions can be contrasted with the approaches followed by some of the earlier NQFs, which adopted extensive regulatory and reform functions. According to Raffe's (2009)<sup>41</sup> typology, NQFs can be placed on a continuum ranging from 'communication' to 'transformational' frameworks.

**Table 1: The functions of NQFs (Source: Adapted from Raffe, 2009)**

<b>Communication frameworks</b>		<b>Transformational frameworks</b>
Starts from existing education and training system		Starts from the vision of a future education and training system
Incremental change		Reform and transformation
Tool for change		Driver of change
'Bottom-up'		'Top-down'
Voluntary		Statutory/Regulatory
Providers have central role		Providers included among stakeholders
Loose		Tight

Over the last decade or so, as the implementation of frameworks has progressed, some European NQFs have taken on positions somewhere in between Raffe's two extremes. NQFs that originally started with limited communication mandates have been seen to extend and deepen their roles and functions, and start to act as agents for change in particular political and institutional contexts. In other cases the regulatory functions have been taken away from QFs, moving them towards communication roles. These adjustments show that QFs, not unexpectedly in view of their short history, still have to find their permanent roles and functions and are continuously evolving. What is clear however is that it would be far too simplistic to categorise European NQFs as being either communication or transformational frameworks.

<sup>41</sup> Raffe, D. 2009. Towards a dynamic model of national qualifications frameworks. International Labour Organisation (ILO) research project: Qualifications frameworks: Implementation and impact. Discussion Document 2. Geneva: ILO.

In order to be able to understand the impact of NQFs, it is necessary to distinguish between the different policy areas and education and training sectors in which they are operating. In some areas for example, in shifting to the use of learning outcomes, some frameworks have become important agents of change and take on reforming roles. In other areas, for instance in the formal recognition of qualifications, frameworks take on more limited communication roles and only trigger reform to a very limited extent. These different roles are illustrated in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2: The reform (transformative) roles of NQFs in relation to the shift to learning outcomes**

Role/Character	Explanation/Example
Starts from the vision of a future education and training system	In many European countries the NQF has been a driver in introducing learning outcomes, setting a target for the future
Reform and transformation	The shift to learning outcomes can have in the long term, deep implications for the way in which qualifications are defined and described, the way assessment takes place and the way labour market stakeholders are involved in the review and renewal of education and training
Driver of change	Research (CEDEFOP, 2009; 2016) demonstrates that NQFs have been strong drivers of the use of learning outcomes in systematic ways across Europe
Regulatory	In a number of countries the learning outcomes approach, used within an NQF context, is now legally established and represents a requirement for providers
Providers included among stakeholders	A key factor in implementing learning outcomes is broad participation that allows for dialogue between different stakeholders
Tight	Relative inflexibility, although this is not necessarily the case as the implementation of learning outcomes requires flexibility and to some extent decentralised decisions and interpretations

**Table 3: The communication role of NQFs in relation to the formal recognition of qualifications**

<b>Role/Character</b>	<b>Explanation/Example</b>
Starts from existing education and training systems	NQFs can support the existing arrangements for recognition at institutional, national, and international levels by providing transparency and improved documentation on qualifications
Incremental change	NQFs can facilitate recognition in the long term by strengthening mutual trust and thus removing some of the obstacles to recognition. This can only happen on an incremental basis over time
Tool for change	NQFs stand out as one tool among several supporting and facilitating recognition
'Bottom-up'	As important decisions on recognition are taken at the level of local institutions, the impact of NQFs depends on their ability to strengthen transparency among end-users
Voluntary	As tools for communication, NQFs need to be trusted as information sources of quality, and to be used
Providers have central role	Providers play key roles in recognition decisions for further learning, and thus need to play key roles in the implementation of NQFs
Loose	The loose (flexible) character of communications-oriented frameworks makes it possible to prioritise transparency-related issues

The variety of characteristics in Tables 2 and 3 show how it would be possible to combine different features to create an NQF that is neither purely communicative nor entirely reforming or transformational. Frameworks could combine different communication and transformation-related characteristics as appropriate for their sectoral/ national/ regional contexts. This kind of flexibility is becoming more apparent as frameworks mature, opening the way for targeted strategies where NQFs are used as reform-tools in particular areas, and as communication tools in others.

Targeted strategies require frameworks to be embedded in institutional, national or regional settings. In cases where frameworks are isolated 'detached' initiatives, their ability to make a difference is much reduced.

## ***Towards a systematic assessment of impact: European debates***

Very few of the new QFs established after 2005/6 have been subject to systematic evaluations. Apart from CEDEFOP's regular annual monitoring and some isolated academic studies carried out in a limited number of countries, priority has been given to initial development, pushing impact issues into the future. In the last two years however, some countries have signalled an interest in developing more systematic approaches to the measurement of impact. Systematic approaches could directly benefit the future development of QFs.

In 2015, the EQF Advisory Group (AG) which is responsible for the coordination of the EQF discussed in some depth the principles for assessing the impact of the EQF in a systematic way. These discussions focussed on impact at national and whole-of-Europe levels. Clarifying the evaluation principles is a challenging task, and conceptualisation has not yet been finalised.

### ***Key elements in a strategy for assessing the impact of frameworks***

Members of the EQF AG agree that assessing the impact of QFs needs to be understood within the broader political and institutional contexts of the frameworks, and should not be reduced to a question of simple 'objective' causality. An assessment methodology must furthermore be able to capture the informed interpretations and opinions of the main stakeholders involved. It is only in this three-dimensional context that the relative success of a framework can be evaluated.

In addition, measuring the impact of a framework requires a robust and agreed-upon baseline. Such baselines must refer to the key objectives of the frameworks in question. The EQF AG emphasised that the baselines should allow the countries involved to clarify the stages of development they have reached, in order to provide realistic starting points for the national assessments. Many of the agreements around baselines will need to acknowledge that countries are still in the early stages of QF implementation. To encourage this work, CEDEFOP drafted an initial baseline proposal with two main elements:

- the four strategic objectives defined by the EQF Recommendation (transparency; mobility; lifelong learning; and modernising education and training); and

- the key (innovative) elements of the QFs (explicit level descriptors, the learning outcomes principle; the introduction of frameworks covering all types and levels of qualifications; the involvement and commitment of stakeholders from the education field as well as the employment sector).

Table 4 shows how indicators can be developed on the basis of a combination of these two elements<sup>42</sup>.

**Table 4: Draft baseline for assessing and measuring QF impact at national level**

<b>Strategic EQF- objectives/ Key elements of QFs</b>	<b>Increasing transparency</b>	<b>Promoting lifelong learning</b>	<b>Increasing mobility</b>	<b>Modernising education and training</b>
Existence of QF level descriptors and the extent to which these levels are known and used	The extent to which the EQF/ NQF learning outcomes-based levels are referred to and integrated into certificates and diplomas, in national education, training and employment databases	The extent to which QF level descriptors are used as reference points by all lifelong learning providers and stakeholders	The extent to which level descriptors are used as reference points by labour market as well as education and training stakeholders	The extent to which learning outcomes-based levels are used as reference and calibration-points when developing new qualifications and when reviewing and renewing existing ones

<sup>42</sup> An additional table outlining parameters for Europe-level impact has also been developed.

<b>Strategic EQF- objectives/ Key elements of QFs</b>	<b>Increasing transparency</b>	<b>Promoting lifelong learning</b>	<b>Increasing mobility</b>	<b>Modernising education and training</b>
Existence of the learning outcomes principle and the extent to which it is implemented	The extent, to which the learning outcomes approach has been developed and implemented by all education and training sectors, for initial as well as continuing education and training	The extent to which decisions on access, exemptions and recognition – including the validation of non-formal and informal learning - refers to learning outcomes	The extent to which the learning outcomes/ competence approach is presented in a format which is understood and trusted in society in general and by employers in particular	The extent to which the learning outcomes approach informs the articulation of standards, programmes, curricula, assessment and teaching methods
The introduction of QFs that include all types and levels of qualifications	The extent to which the relation between all types and levels of qualifications is demonstrated by the QF	The extent to which the QFs increased communication and cooperation between stakeholders across education, training, and the labour market	The extent to which the QF includes all qualifications and certificates relevant for employers and job-seekers	The extent to which the QF forms an integrated part of the national education and training system/policies

Strategic EQF-objectives/ Key elements of QFs	Increasing transparency	Promoting lifelong learning	Increasing mobility	Modernising education and training
The involvement and commitment of relevant stakeholders	The extent to which stakeholders from education and training, employment, civil society and other relevant sectors are aware of, committed to and actively use the QF	The extent to which the QF facilitates cooperation between stakeholders involved in life-long learning, for example in the form of efficient delivery of validation of prior learning	The extent to which the QF is known to and seen as being relevant and credible, by labour market stakeholders	The extent to which the QF has led to a broadening of participation/ involvement in the governance of education and training

While only indicative, Table 4 points to the types of criteria that could be investigated in a systematic QF impact assessment. While the horizontal axis of the table reflects the core objectives of the 2008 EQF Recommendation and is thus specific to the European context, the vertical axes refer to generic factors shared by QFs worldwide. The objectives in the horizontal axis could be replaced by other objectives that are relevant for particular national contexts. While thus far discussed only in the context of the EQF AG and yet to be tested empirically, the approach could potentially trigger discussion around systematic assessment of the impact of QFs elsewhere, and possibly provide a basis for their development and improvement.

### ***Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and qualifications frameworks – a mutually beneficial relationship***

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. Divided into ten sub-points, the implementation of this SDG is supported by a series of indicators to help policy makers and practitioners to relate to the challenges at hand. These indicators can be divided into three main categories as follows.

- The first category comprises traditional quantitative indicators that relate to enrolment and completion rates in different education and training subsets, ranging from primary to secondary and tertiary levels of education and training, and beyond.
- The second category is qualitative, addressing the outcomes of education and training, and considering the percentages of learners who have achieved particular levels of proficiency across a range of learning outcomes, such as those relating to literacy, numeracy, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and others.
- The third category is also qualitative, referring to the percentages of learners receiving education in quality programmes, be this in pre-primary, primary, secondary or tertiary education, or TVET.

While traditional statistical instruments can address the first category of indicators, it is clear that any measurement of learner proficiency or programme quality would have to go beyond a purely quantitative approach. QFs, through their emphases on learning outcomes, can in many cases provide the reference points and baselines required for measuring progress in these areas. The focus of QFs on what learners know, understand and are able to do can feed directly into measuring mastery and proficiency levels. Introducing learning outcomes-based level descriptors, and capturing both the intended and actual outcomes of education and training, is of crucial importance for any strategy aiming to increase the quality of the outcomes as well as increasing learner enrolment and completion rates. Important discussion in the near future needs to focus on how baselines can be developed for this work.

## CONCLUSION

The large majority of QFs worldwide have yet to reach maturity and full operational status. It is not necessarily a given that all of these QFs will reach a stage where they add value to education and training policies and practices, and directly benefit learners and the public. To enhance their potential for success, it is necessary to monitor and 'measure' the impact of QFs in a systematic way. This paper, in referring mainly to European NQF development over the last decade, identifies the need to develop and agree on clear baselines for the assessment and 'measurement' of the progress and impact of QFs. European experiences and debates are relevant, but will clearly need to be developed further, both conceptually and in terms of empirical testing. The SDGs

for education and lifelong learning adopted in early 2016 may prove relevant for these discussions and developments; their links to QF development need to be explored more deeply. Interaction between the SDGs and QFs is possible and necessary.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS: LOOKING FORWARD**



## National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs)

*Dr Thani Al Mehairi*

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### BACKGROUND TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (QF*Emirates*)

To date, about 150 countries across the world are involved in the development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs). Similar to NQFs in other countries, the purpose of UAE's NQF, the *QFEmirates*, is to act as a catalyst for the development of knowledge and competency-based qualifications, and the processes to assess learning and prior experience. It facilitates quality assured, consistent and valid assessment in the workplace as well as in formal and informal settings, playing a vital role in the future productivity, competitiveness and success of the UAE. In line with all world-class NQFs, key drivers of the *QFEmirates* are:

- addressing skills gaps and skills shortages and increasing labour market opportunities that align with the Federal priority of Emiratisation; and
- acting as a reference point for all nationally-recognised qualifications that can be used by the country's decision makers to develop strategic education and training policy to improve economic and social prosperity and wellbeing.

Although the definition, purposes and architecture of the *QFEmirates* are similar to well-established and well-recognised NQFs in other countries, the history of NQF development in the UAE is quite unique. In 2005, a research team was assembled under the auspices of the UAE Armed Forces to explore the development of a military Qualifications Framework (QF) based on learning outcomes. The team conducted preliminary research of a range of QFs including those in Australia, United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, South Africa, New Zealand and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Subsequently, a national project team was established in June 2007 to draft a military QF.

The need for a military QF arose from the many armed forces personnel who had many years of experience and, in many instances, undertaken courses and programmes

internationally and gained the respective qualifications or certificates. Many retiring at a young age and looking to transit to the civilian workforce were confronted with UAE's education and training system and employers not formally recognising their experiences. Many military personnel had no formal documentation, certificates or awards to provide evidence of their experiences. There were instances of armed forces personnel having completed Year 10 at High School, joining the military and whilst in military service subsequently obtaining a degree from another country such as the UK. Having met the entry requirements for the degree, they found on their return to the UAE, that their qualifications were neither recognised nor declared equivalent for entry into higher programmes. Similarly, personnel in other agencies also experienced these inequities.

The military QF project identified a need to extend the framework into the civilian workforce in order for recognition to be afforded to those transitioning from military to civilian work. It was thought that an NQF could provide the bridge between the two sectors. As a result, the project shifted its focus and attention to developing an NQF for the UAE. The NQF Project Team established in 2007 set about, with its changed focus, to develop an NQF based on international practice regarding learning outcomes and levels. The initial research into the UAE education and training system, and comparable qualifications systems of other countries, indicated that a 10-level, five-strand framework would be an appropriate fit for the UAE. Primarily, this was due to the existence of the hybrid UAE education and training system which includes:

- a Higher Education system that draws its operational system from the United States of America (USA) and the UK;
- a general education/school system which draws on that in the UK in combination with those in other national systems; and
- a fragmented and disparate Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, partly overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and partly governed by the Ministry of Education.

Initially, the NQF Project Team used the EQF as the base framework for alignment and development of UAE's NQF as there was a particular interest in ensuring that it would readily align with it. A review of the Bologna Agreement indicated that a three-cycle model was preferred in the European system. However, in the UAE, adopting a three-cycle model would have presented difficulties as a four-level system already existed. Introducing a three-level system would have meant that recipients of post-degree

qualifications between Bachelor and Master's degrees would no longer be able to access or have a nationally-recognised qualifications already existing in the UAE. So an additional level was inserted between Levels 7 and 9. At the lower levels of the NQF, due to the heavy reliance on skilled and unskilled overseas workers in the UAE and the paucity of local UAE Nationals with vocational qualifications, further impaired by low levels of literacy and numeracy, inserting an additional level between Levels 1 and 3 was also considered to be relevant and appropriate.

Bologna Framework	European Qualifications Framework	QF <i>Emirates</i> Level	Generic Nomenclature	Principal Qualification Titles used in the QF <i>Emirates</i> (each with its own profile)		
				Vocational Education and Training (VET)	Higher Education (HE)	General Education (G12-GE)
Third Cycle	8	10	Doctoral Degree	–	Doctoral	–
Second Cycle	7	9	Master Degree	Applied Master	Master	–
First Cycle	6	8	Graduate Diploma	Applied Graduate Diploma	Post-Graduate Diploma	–
Short Cycle		7	Bachelor Degree	Applied Bachelor	Bachelor	–
–	5	6	Diploma	Advanced Diploma	Higher Diploma	–
–	4	5	Diploma/ Associate Degree	Diploma	Associate Degree	–
–	3	4	Certificate	Certificate 4	–	Secondary School Certificate (G12)
–	2	3	Certificate	Certificate 3	–	TBA
–	1	2	Certificate	Certificate 2	–	–
–		1	Certificate	Certificate 1	–	–

**Figure 1: QF*Emirates* principal qualification titles and alignment to the EQF and Bologna Framework**

For the principle of 'strands' of learning outcomes that underpin NQFs, the QF*Emirates* drew on the eight strands of learning outcomes covering knowledge, skills and competences, used in the EQF and in the Irish QF. The UAE adopted five strands of learning outcomes that reflect what a learner is expected to achieve at each respective QF level. The strands cover knowledge, skills, and competency which has three sub-competencies (autonomy and responsibility; role in context; and self-development) under the overarching heading of Aspects of Competence. The QF*Emirates* Level Descriptors comprise 10 levels across five (5) learning outcome strands amounting to 50 outcome statements presented in similar type and style to those of other NQFs.

The *QFEmirates* has features of both a ‘reforming framework’ (it took the existing system as its starting point, and aimed to improve it) and a ‘transformational framework’ (it aims to drive radical change in the education and training system) (Raffe, 2009). It also has features of an outcomes-led framework that reforms an education system, such as having outcomes defined separately from institutions, which are then responsible for designing learning programmes against the outcomes (Allais, 2007).

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *QFEmirates*

CEDEFOP (2014:11) identified four stages of NQF development, which are “continuous and iterative developments; their relevance and impact depend[ing] on continuous feedback from stakeholders and users”. The European Training Foundation (ETF) (2012) also identified four stages, based on the establishment and/or involvement of key bodies responsible for NQF implementation. The UAE completed CEDEFOP’s design stage, i.e. objectives, rationale and architecture, when the NQA Board approved the *QFEmirates* in February 2012. Being in the early operational stage means that the *QFEmirates* “has been introduced as a permanent and visible feature of the national qualification system and that its principles are being actively promoted and applied” (CEDEFOP, 2015:13). The UAE entered the ETF’s implementation-in-progress stage when the NQA Board was established on 23 August 2010 by Federal Decree. This stage includes the objective of establishing and maintaining systems, processes and procedures to ensure that the NQF is the national frame of reference for qualifications in the country.

Implementation highlights for the *QFEmirates* are as follows.

- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with New Zealand Qualifications Authority, UK Government, and Bahrain’s QAA.
- Bodies established: Vocational Education and Training Awards Council (VETAC) and two awarding bodies.
- Event hosting/participation: Increasing local, national and international awareness of the *QFEmirates*.
- Official referencing: *QFEmirates* to UK QCF and UK FHEQ. A referencing exercise is currently being undertaken with the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.
- Vocational qualifications: The National Qualifications Authority (NQA) has endorsed around 100 vocational qualifications as nationally-

recognised qualifications.

- National guidelines for VET: The NQA Board has approved guidelines for national vocational qualifications development, provider registration, awarding bodies, and assessors/verifiers.
- Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA): CAA's Standards for Licensure and Accreditation 2011 require all Higher Education programmes to be designed, delivered and reviewed in accordance with the *QFEmirates*.
- Joint projects: Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) Gulf Qualifications Framework (with NQA as chair); testing centres for construction workers (with Ministry of Labour); teacher licensing (with NQA as chair), Occupations and Careers Handbook for UAE Nationals (with Ministry of Presidential Affairs and other agencies).

NQF implementation challenges experienced in the UAE are not that different to those experienced in other countries. The challenges have included for example, shifting to a learning outcomes approach, insufficient dialogue between UAE's VET and Higher Education sectors at local and national levels, implementing the NQF across all sectors of education and training, and low awareness of the *QFEmirates*.

## **IN CLOSING: BEST PRACTICE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE *QFEmirates***

Even though countries' NQFs differ and are at different stages of development or implementation, the UAE must consider the best practices and future directions of NQFs if it is to move the *QFEmirates* into the CEDEFOP's Advanced Operational Stage and ETF's Full Implementation Stage. These practices *inter alia* include the following.

- NQFs need to be designed and implemented in the light of national needs, circumstances, and resources. Best international practice should be studied for policy learning, but not for policy borrowing. Each country must develop their own understanding and judgement of what might be required for their own needs. Moreover, NQFs cannot be implemented at a speed or level of complexity that exceeds national capacities to sustain such changes.

- NQFs can only be effective as part of broader policy programmes; correspondingly, they should be designed and implemented in an integrated way.
- NQFs need to start from the existing systems, and promote incremental reform.
- NQFs need to become national structuring and planning instruments, and should be integrated into databases, guidance materials, and other elements, in a way that reflects the structure of the NQF.
- NQFs should be promoted via awareness programmes. It is common for students, learners, parents, employers, and governments to value university qualifications and/or qualifications that can lead to university. Even employers seem to be not in favour of qualifications awarded by industry-led providers. Many vocational qualifications have been developed in different countries, but never used. Wider engagement of industry in the design and content of curricula and qualifications results in making vocational qualifications more relevant. New qualifications need to be based on occupational standards, which define work-related competences for specific occupations, and labour market demands, and, furthermore, be linked to higher-level qualifications in order to allow progression, which raises their market value. In order for the occupational standards to be commonly used, it is essential to develop clear identifications of different qualification types and how they can be built based on occupational standards.
- Communication between Education and training systems and labour markets must be improved. Employers need to be involved in designing qualifications. It is common for employers to see the frameworks as something coming from educational institutions, while educational institutions see frameworks as coming from industry. Moreover, employers may not always articulate what they currently require, or anticipate what skills or qualifications they may require in the future. NQFs can provide a platform for social dialogue among all stakeholders, such as ministries, employers, trade unions, education authorities, VET agencies, individual

experts, and others, in order to work collaboratively. NQFs need to strengthen their visibility in labour markets, e.g. assist in the development of career pathways, certify achievements at work, guidance, and so on.

- NQFs should focus not only on developing qualifications, but also on ensuring coordinated skills, labour market and socio-economic policies in particular sectors of economy, labour market research, *etcetera*. The best chance of success is obtained when starting with particular sectors, focusing on their needs and possibilities, and building on this work later on.
- NQFs need to influence the relationships between the sub-systems of education and training, and improve the links between levels and types of qualifications, which will result in improving both vertical and horizontal progression, such as that from VET to Higher Education. Institutions must be obliged to reserve some of their spaces to those coming through non-traditional routes, such as those without school- leaving certificates, those from the VET sector, mature adults, and others.
- NQFs need to cover not only the formal qualifications awarded by national authorities, but also education and training activities taking place in the non-formal and informal environment, thus addressing lifelong learning and the validation of non-formal and informal learning experiences acquired outside formal schooling or training. The United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Guidelines for the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning reflect the priority given by Member States to the establishment of RVA mechanisms linked to NQFs and lifelong learning strategies. In a number of countries, including but not limited to the UK, Canada, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, RVA of non-formal and informal learning has been institutionalised and operates in relation to the standards of the existing curricula in educational institutions.
- NQFs need to establish clear links between assessment and standards. NQFs include levels of qualifications based on learning outcomes, which are themselves based on the standards against which learners

are assessed. Correspondingly, assessment approaches are influenced by NQFs. Moreover, NQFs promote the principle of applying the same assessment standards to obtaining a qualification, no matter how the individual acquired their learning, through this practice encouraging countries to develop and implement assessment methods that are appropriate for formal, non-formal and informal learning.

- NQFs need to be associated with quality assurance arrangements. In order to be included in an NQF, a qualification must be validated against particular criteria, and providers are commonly required to be accredited to award the qualification. Assessments also have to be quality assured, or verified. Quality assurance usually focuses on the qualifications development process, making sure that qualifications are of the required quality. It also focuses on assessment and certification, ensuring that new qualification holders meet the learning outcomes defined in the standards. Mechanisms and systems for the recognition of qualifications need to be developed in cooperation with all stakeholders in order to ensure fair and transparent recognition decisions. Stakeholders must not only participate in recognition practices, but also need to accept them. Bureaucracy must be avoided and the administrative burden should be kept as low as possible. Logos must be used to provide evidence that a qualification has been subjected to a rigorous quality assurance process.
- NQFs need to support the local and international recognition of qualifications. Recognition can mean (1) the process of granting official status to skills and competences (or learning outcomes) and can be attested formally through the awarding of a qualification; (2) transparency or readability, which means that a holder's certificate is understood when presented to employers or institutions; (3) the recognition of the certificate's value in the labour market or for academic entry or progression (sometimes called currency); and (4) the acceptance of the qualification when the holder changes jobs or countries (sometimes called portability). In any case, a new qualification included in the NQF must be trusted, quality assured and accepted by all stakeholders. The most established transnational framework, the EQF, does not address recognition in the legal meaning of the word. Instead, it intends to improve the transparency,

comparability, and portability of qualifications. A single body responsible for coordinating the overall recognition, validation, and accreditation linked to NQFs, providing oversight, curriculum development, supervising skills tests, certification, accreditation, *etcetera*, may resolve the situation.

- NQFs need to meet the learning needs of the adult and elderly population focusing on lifelong, on-the-job, and part-time learning.
- NQFs need to use common language and terms that are easily understood by all stakeholders, across all sub-frameworks/frameworks. Novel terminology, language, and concepts may diminish the trust and knowledge about the standards and quality of the previous qualifications.
- The development of all NQFs is based on learning outcomes, which need to be adjusted to national traditions and approaches, and respect the social and institutional contexts within which they operate. Learning outcomes should not be treated as being merely technical constructs. Learning outcomes are being applied to curricula and teaching, and are being used to identify appropriate criteria for assessment and standards. However, it is recommended that countries take a more gradual approach rather than making a radical switch, so that they can take into account such traditional inputs as the institutional provision, structure, and duration of a programme. Learning outcomes are required to provide transparent links to NQF level descriptors that capture the complexities of the qualifications in the framework and increase their transparency in the labour market. Learning outcomes need to be introduced across the education and training sectors in consistent ways. If learning outcomes are used differently between institutions, sectors and countries, it weakens their transparency and correspondingly affects their comparison. Learning outcomes-based levels have to become understandable and visible to ordinary people. The inclusion of NQF levels in certificates and qualifications is crucial for the future of QFs.
- NQF development should be treated as being complementary to building and improving the capacity of education and training providers. Strong professional associations and strong educational institutions are

essential for the successful implementation of NQFs. The 'autonomy' and 'empowerment' of providers must be promoted, based on increased financial support, investment in the training of educational staff, ongoing research into labour market needs, and other kinds of support. It is essential to ensure that not only education fees are affordable, but also that learners can afford to access education and training in terms of lost income during periods of study, especially in poor countries.

- The national development of QFs is paralleled and supported by the emergence of Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs), which aim to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications across countries. The referencing of national QFs to an RQF facilitates the cross-border transparency, currency, and portability of qualifications as well as supporting the recognition of qualifications. The key goal of any RQF is to understand and compare the qualifications systems of the country NQFs related to it. RQFs are being developed in such world regions as the European Union (EU) (EQF) and European Higher Education Area (EHEA/Bologna Framework), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN RQF), Small States of the Commonwealth, and others. The NQA is leading the development of a regional QF for the Gulf region, the Gulf Qualifications Framework (GQF).
- NQFs should not be considered as the only means to achieve national policy objectives. An NQF may be used to reference national qualifications to a common reference framework, while the other national objectives may be achieved by other means.
- NQFs should be multi-level with objectives and change processes that vary within and across sub-frameworks. It may be beneficial to distinguish development within sub-frameworks and integration across them. A country, especially if resources or expertise are scarce, may start with by establishing a QF in a particular sector or industry, before building up to a comprehensive framework.

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# **Sectoral Qualifications Framework in Context: The Mauritian Experience in Re-engineering Qualifications in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Sector**

*Mr Robin Phoolchund and Mr Rajcoomar Ramchurun*

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## **INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

With the stand-alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Education and its related targets, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that education is essential for the success of all SDGs (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2016). This universal agenda is a strong commitment of the world to transform the lives of people. It recognises that the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – Early Childhood Development (ECD), primary, secondary, tertiary, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) – is a lynchpin condition to provide access to lifelong learning opportunities that help individuals to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society.

This goal triggers the need to review current education and training processes and transactions for more efficiency and equity. The development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) has been a major international trend in reforming national education and training systems since the 1990's. As part of a broader policy agenda, it is now gaining ground in the African continent and in other developing countries.

However, it should be recognised that while there are a number of benefits in these developments, the development of NQFs is also technically and institutionally demanding (Tuck, 2007).

Since 2002, Mauritius has successfully developed, implemented and maintained its NQF. With its 10 levels, this NQF is used as an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuous spectrum of

agreed levels. It is also used to indicate the compatibility of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another across the primary/secondary sector to vocational and even the academic sector.

Currently some 4428 unit-based national standards located in 23 sectors of the economy sit on the NQF, and some 300 foreign qualifications have been compared to the NQF levels for the purposes of recognition and comparability. The NQF has been instrumental in the conduct of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which is highly considered as an empowering tool and is instrumental in fostering lifelong learning.

This paper makes the case for a specific sector namely that of ECD, where a qualification structure had to be designed with a view to forging qualification pathways for both new entrants and for those already in the sector for years, and who needed to engage in up-skilling. In so doing, the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) has set a new path towards the establishment of a Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF).

The paper highlights the importance of professionalisation in the ECD sector, and the need for qualifications pathways to this end. The inextricable link between the professionalization of ECD practitioners and quality provision has been a central debate in recent years and countries are increasingly recognising the need to reform and reconceptualise the early childhood workforce, especially in Africa. The general literature also suggests links between the formal levels of qualifications obtained by staff and the quality of ECD provided. It is undeniable that the workforce is central in achieving the policy goals of increasing both the quantity and quality of provision (Dalli and Urban, 2013; MacNaughton, 2005).

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) IN MAURITIUS**

The relevance of ECD in the educational landscape in Mauritius has increasingly gained importance over the last 40 years. Early childhood is the most rapid period of development in a human life, and it lays the foundations for further learning and development. Although individual children develop at their own paces, it is widely recognised that all children progress through an identifiable sequence of physical, cognitive and emotional stages of growth and change.

The ECD approach in Mauritius is based on the proven fact that young children respond

best when care-givers use specific techniques designed to encourage and stimulate their progress to subsequent levels of development.

### ***A brief history***

Free education in Mauritius concerns mainly the whole of the primary and secondary sectors; education in the tertiary sector is partially free. Primary education – from the age of five years – was already in place and offered free to everyone since the pre-independence period, while secondary education became free in 1997.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) was traditionally offered by private providers, commonly known at the time as '*petit ecole*'; participating toddlers were referred to as the '*below*'. As such there has been a wide disparity in the pre-primary education offerings in Mauritius.

Besides disparity in terms of the quality of education provided in this sector, there has also been wide disparity in the cost of schooling and in the qualifications of the teaching personnel in these schools. This created an unfair advantage for the few who could afford better-equipped and well-staffed schools. Those benefiting from the support of the home had a head start. Children deprived of pre-primary education were at a disadvantage as primary schools could not really compensate for the lack of readiness for primary schooling.

Mauritius has had support from several developed countries in the development of its ECD sector namely France, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and India. Major projects funded by the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UNESCO's Save the Children programme have been of tremendous help in the uplifting of ECD practices and also in increasing access. Another major landmark in the sector has been the conduct of a longitudinal study in ECD through a joint Child Health and Education Project funded jointly by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

### **Provision of pre-school education in Mauritius 1990-2000**

In 1993 the registration of pre-primary schools started, and a vast expansion in terms

of setting up pre-primary classes in primary schools followed. In 1996, 43 pre-primary schools were constructed with the financial help of World Bank. The equitable access of children to pre-school education was encouraged through a monthly per-capita grant of 200 MUR [= \$5.7] payable for all children of four years or older.

### **Implementing the Education for All (EFA) goals**

Implementing the Education for All (EFA) Goals in the ECD sector generally refers to developing and implementing programmes for Goals 1 and 6. EFA Goal 1 aims to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable disadvantaged children. It states that education needs to begin before children start primary school. The 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report *Strong Foundations* shows that ECCE is both a right in itself and is also vital to give children a good start in life. It is also a catalyst for all the other EFA goals, and several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [Global Monitoring Report, 2000-2015].

The quality of early childhood programs is instrumental to their effectiveness in improving the health and the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children. It is closely linked to EFA Goal 6, which is to improve all aspects of the quality of education so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The Republic of Mauritius has attained substantial progress in the enhancement of human welfare, the ultimate goal of development. Mauritius can be considered to be one of the most advanced countries on the African continent on this score. Government's investment in health, education, women's development and poverty reduction has been instrumental in the realisation of these achievements.

### **Review of the pre-school regulations**

In order to regulate the sector, a new legal framework was put in place in October 2011. Since January 2012, all private pre-primary schools have had to be registered in line with the 'Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Act (ECCEA) of 2011'.

## **Capacity-building and professionalisation in the sector**

Over the past 10 years ECCE in Mauritius has undergone some rapid and some gradual professionalisation with a wide variety of teacher training/ECD training programmes being available in the country. Mauritius has a strategic vision that all pre-primary educators must be fully trained and qualified with a view to enhancing their professional development for the general improvement of ECCE.

Despite the provision of training programmes by the state-owned Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as the Organisation Mondiale pour L'Education Prescolaire (OMEP) have been active in providing short courses for ECD practitioners thus guaranteeing a minimum knowhow in the sector.

Today, the following training options are available for pre-school teachers and the supervisory cadres in ECCE:

- National Certificate in ECCE Levels 2, 3 and 4, developed by the MQA and awarded by the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD);
- Certificate of Proficiency in Early Childhood; Teacher's Certificate in Early Childhood; and Teacher's Diploma in Early Childhood Education all offered by the MIE;
- Certificate of Proficiency in the Management of ECD Services, and the Bachelor in ECD, offered by the Open University of Mauritius; and
- the BSc [Hons] in Early Childhood Management and Administration offered by the University of Technology, Mauritius.

## **MAURITIUS-AFRICA INITIATIVES**

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has created Inter-Country Quality Nodes (ICQN) in a number of thematic areas, one being ECD. ECD is also one of the priority areas of the African Union's Plan of Action of the Second Decade of Education in Africa. Mauritius is spearheading this regional initiative.

The ICQN for ECD is an inter-governmental initiative for policy dialogue and collaborative action among the African Ministers of Education and strategic partners, for advancing

the ECD agenda in Africa. This collaborative approach relies on the networking of African institutions and experts, for the exchange of research findings and other knowledge, and capacity building to respond in supportive ways to the varying contexts in which ECD programmes are being implemented. The ICQN for ECD is hosted in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources and Tertiary Education and Scientific Research of Mauritius.

The Mauritius-Africa Initiative under the aegis of the ADEA Working Group in ECD identifies Mauritius as a knowledge hub and centre of excellence in relation to global ECD practices (ICQN-ECD, 2016). It aims to contribute to the achievement of the EFA goals and the MDGs in Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as strengthening of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by setting up a regional programme for capacity building and knowledge sharing around ECD and ECCE.

## **SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS (SQFs)**

From the existing literature it is generally clear that Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks (SQFs) are not well established despite the existence of several of these entities in various aggregated states. Three examples of SQFs can be found in the European context (Syben, 2009; Tuning Project, 2012), in the automotive and construction industries, in the creative and performing disciplines, and in the Humanities. However, be they operational within or across countries/ regions, SQFs are increasingly being developed across the world.

SQFs are understood as being frameworks of qualifications established by sectors. They show what learners know, understand and are able to do on the basis of given qualifications in particular sectors, in terms of the learning outcomes expected. SQFs are increasingly viewed as tools for competency management: they support the development of programmes that are suited to job markets, and enable the comparison of qualifications.

SQFs use NQFs and Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs) as reference points but tend to offer more practical and contextual guidance for employers/employees, education and training providers, and learners in general. However, the relationships between the QFs at the different levels are not necessarily clearly expressed: sectoral qualifications may or may not be comparable with similar qualifications embedded in

NQFs. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that SQFs supplement NQFs. It is important that attempts to develop SQFs address the unique identities of the disciplines involved.

## **THE MAURITIAN EXPERIENCE IN CHARTING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT QUALIFICATIONS: PRELUDE TO A SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

With a view to rationalizing the qualifications requirements for ECD in Mauritius, a Sub-Committee comprising representatives from the MQA, MIE, ECCEA, and Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare held a series of consultative meetings to chart the qualifications and learning pathways required. This exercise was the first of its kind in the country. It created an opportunity for the MQA to develop a matrix of qualifications based on NQF level descriptors and learning outcomes, for different levels of responsibility in the sector. The governance of the sector by two major sets of legislation – the Early Childhood Care Authority Act, and the Children’s Protection Act – which apply to the related public, private, and voluntary workforces, were taken into account. The existing NQF qualifications as detailed below provide specific descriptions of knowledge, skills and competencies needed for the ECD QF.

### **1. National Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education, Level 2**

For Childcare Givers, it is proposed that new entrants possess a Level 2 National Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education. The MIE has already embarked on a short course, the ‘Foundation Course for Child Day Care Givers’, for people working as helpers in day-care centres. Those who have already followed this course may consider an RPL route towards achieving the Level 2 National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care.

### **2. National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care, Level 3**

It was proposed that the new position of ‘Assistant Teacher’ be introduced for holders of the Level 3 National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care. This development would make progression possible for those possessing the Level 2 National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care, in their career pathways. The Level 3 National Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education could also be used as an entry qualification to access the Certificate of Proficiency: Early Childhood Development (CP:

ECD) offered by the MIE.

### **3. National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care, Level 4**

The Level 4 National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care would sit at the same level to that of the CP: ECD. Those possessing either of these qualifications would be able to access the Teacher's Certificate awarded by MIE. The former would be the most appropriate qualification for the Day Care Manager, as it focuses on developing supervisory competencies and supporting Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

### **4. National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care, Level 5**

It is proposed that in addition to the Teacher's Certificate, the Level 5 qualification be considered as an alternative qualification requirement for registration as an Educator with the ECCEA.

Table 1: Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	Qualifications		Occupation/s
6	Teacher's Diploma (MIE)	National Diploma Level 6 in Early Childhood Education and Care Management	
5	HSC • Teacher's Certificate (MIE) • Diploma Early Childhood (TAFE)	NC Level 5 in Early Childhood Education and Care	Educator
4	Certificate of Proficiency (MIE)	NC Level 4 in Early Childhood Education and Care	Manager
3	SC	NC Level 3 in Early Childhood Education and Care	Pre-primary Support Teacher (New Grade)
2		NC Level 2 in Early Childhood Education and Care  (Holders of Foundation Course may acquire NC Level 2 through RPL)	Child Care Giver
1	Certificate of Primary Education		



Levels of the SQF for ECD are related to the NQF levels. They are expressed according to the demands of working positions in the ECD sector, for which there are different tasks and divisions of labour. The SQF levels can be defined by:

- the range and complexity of operations that individuals need to execute;
- the degree of instruction detail necessary to enable individuals to fulfil tasks; and
- the intensity and form of control required.

The SQF seeks to rationalise the qualifications requirements in the ECD workforce in Mauritius by developing progression pathways from the lowest rungs of the occupations involved, to the highest. It shows clearly, the expectations regarding learning demands and levels of practice for care givers, assistant teachers, and educators. This framework will also be instrumental in mapping new remuneration orders in the sector.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social changes such as the presence of increasing numbers of mothers in the labour force, and new emerging family structures are placing higher demands on ECD practitioners than was previously the case. The professionalisation of the roles of ECD practitioners to include appropriate education and training, and structured career paths, has potential to lead to improved status for the sector and serve to attract and retain high-calibre staff. As a prelude to an SQF for the ECD sector, the MQA has been able to develop a clear matrix of qualifications which connects effectively to the NQF in the country.

Similar processes are currently underway for two further sectors, namely Agriculture and Social Work Practice. It is foreseen that SQFs will become increasingly prominent in the reconciliation of both the occupational and training standards.

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# Regional Qualifications Frameworks (RQFs), and Impact

*Mr Jens Bjornavold<sup>43</sup>*

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## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

There is an explosion in the number of Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) at national, regional and sectoral levels, all over the world. Global inventories indicate that there are over 140 National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) worldwide and that the number is increasing. A key question therefore, is: Do these QFs make an impact? Do they make a difference for individuals, sectors, countries and regions? For the 140 plus frameworks to survive and remain important system instruments, the question of impact is crucial.

This paper reflects on the measuring of impact. Firstly, what kinds of methods are available for measuring or assessing impact? Perhaps even more important are the questions: What kind of baseline and reference points can be used in this assessment? Baselines are at the core of assessing the impact of QFs because they have to do with the expectations and aspirations of the QFs. Are the expectations too high or too modest? Where is the balanced middle ground of aspirations to be found? Expectations have implications for the baselines, reference points and measurement success regarding QFs. A third challenge is the question of whether or not it is possible to disentangle the impact of QFs from the impacts of a range of other related initiatives in the public and private sectors. In other words, is it possible to point out the specific impact of a QF?

The paper also reflects on the issue of assessing impact against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). First, it draws on experiences from the development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the introduction of NQFs on a wide scale across Europe. Second, it considers links with the SDGs. In Europe, in 2004/2005 when work commenced on the EQF, there were four European countries which had

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<sup>43</sup> This paper was developed by Ms Tshidi Leso and Dr Heidi Bolton of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), on the basis of the presentation delivered by Mr Jens Bjornavold of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), at the SAQA-hosted International Seminar: Qualifications Frameworks – Agenda Towards 2030 held on 20 May 2016 in Cape Town, South Africa.

established NQFs. These included France, Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK). Today, in mid-2016, there are 39 countries in Europe with QFs. To have an NQF however, does not necessarily mean that it is operational. It could mean that there is some form of development underway. Some of these NQFs never get to the operational stages; some do not survive.

## **THE EUROPEAN SITUATION**

In about a decade, Europe has developed NQFs which could be characterised as being fully or partially operational. In order to be categorised as being fully operational, NQFs need to meet four sets of criteria. First, the conceptual and technical designs for the NQF have to have been completed, and the legal requirements finalised. Second, the NQFs need to be comprehensive and include a significant proportion of the qualifications in a country: all types and levels of qualifications need to have been addressed. Third, the NQF must be visible and accessible to all the main stakeholders and the public in general. Finally, the NQF needs to be starting to impact on, and make a difference in, people's lives. These are reasonably clear criteria. It is clear that the numbers of NQFs have been increasing, particularly in recent years. However, there is a concern as to whether or not this 'explosion' of NQF development is sustainable.

## **THE PERMANENCE AND VISIBILITY OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) carried out a survey between November 2015 and January 2016<sup>44</sup>, which aimed to include all of the cooperating countries in the EQF. In the survey, two of the questions – about sustainability and visibility – were asked in an attempt to develop an understanding of these frameworks and the extent to which they were becoming permanent features of the national education, training, and employment landscapes in the countries. The aim was also to determine the degree to which the NQFs were visible to the stakeholders and citizens in the countries.

It was found that in the vast majority of the countries involved, the authorities saw the NQFs as being permanent features of their systems – as part of the education and

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44 The reporting on this work is forthcoming.

training mechanisms or structures. This permanence was reflected in the adoption of the legal basis for the NQFs, and in the institutional arrangements which had been put in place. It was however worrying that in the majority of these countries the frameworks had so far stayed out of the sight of the general public. NQF development had been carried out mostly at the level of administration, ministries, the different stakeholders and social partners in the countries. It had not really included the general public to the extent necessary for longer term NQF implementation and further development. The period under consideration is a little bit more than a decade. The fact that individual learners are not necessarily being reached is understandable, but is still a warning sign. If QFs are going to be sustainable, they have to become visible as soon as possible.

CEDEFOP has conducted considerable research into different aspects relating to QFs, and the implementation of learning outcomes and qualifications in general. The picture drawn in the sections that follow is based on this body of research in general.

## **OBSERVABLE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

Three areas can be identified where the significant impact of QFs is widely acknowledged. The first is realised through a shift to learning outcomes. Amongst the CEDEFOP studies, those involving all the European countries involved in 2006 and 2007<sup>45</sup>, and repeated between 2013 and 2015<sup>46</sup> sought to ascertain changes in the different education and training areas. General, vocational, and Higher Education, and adult lifelong learning, were considered. The shift to learning outcomes was found to be accelerating in most of these sectors and particularly in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education, from 2008 onwards. In addition, these shifts were systematic.

When the researchers asked stakeholders in the 33 countries covered in the studies, about impact, respondents referred to the importance of promoting NQFs as instruments that enabled systematic shifts to the use of learning outcomes, which then affected other aspects of the systems. Implications for the ways in which assessment was carried out, the ways in which standards were designed and for teaching and learning, were highlighted. It was clear that NQFs have had a direct impact on moves to a 'learning

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45 CEDEFOP. 2009. The shift to learning outcomes: Policies and practices in Europe. Luxembourg: Publications Office. CEDEFOP Reference Series; 72. Accessed at <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/12900.aspx>, May 2016.

46 CEDEFOP. 2016. Application of learning outcomes approaches across Europe (forthcoming).

outcomes perspective' and the associated implications for education, training, and approaches to learning in general.

A second and significant area of the impact of NQFs has been the increase in stakeholder involvement in, and interaction around, the various aspects of education and training. It is important that wide groups of stakeholders be involved, for an operational QF.

Third, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has assumed a central place in NQF contexts. Countries have used QFs to address the issue of RPL in far more systematic ways than were previously the case. Many countries have used NQF development to drive their RPL agendas forwards.

There are other areas where NQFs have had little impact, for example in articulation in relation to training systems. There have however, been positive developments in this regard, in Higher Education: several 'recognition conventions' have been established, and NQFs with their level descriptors have supported recognition practices.

There are instances in which NQFs have influenced institutional reform. In a small number of countries, NQFs have led to a rethinking of institutions at national level. The role of a QF is not necessarily to reform a system, but each QF tends to have at least a partial focus on reform. In some instances, QFs have been used to drive change. In addition to enabling a shift to the use of learning outcomes, QFs have played central roles in enhancing and increasing communication and transparency throughout education and training systems. In some instances, the use of learning outcomes has been transformative.

All in all, there is a general realisation that assessing the impact of NQFs cannot be a simplistic exercise. The aspirations and contexts of the frameworks need to be considered, and the complexity of each of these aspects needs to be explored. The aspirations and contexts of QFs frame and inform their impact.

## **ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

There has been debate in the European context, around how to proceed regarding the measurement and monitoring of the impact of QFs, but relatively little progress thus far. CEDEFOP carries out annual monitoring, and some countries have been doing evaluation

studies, but the approach has not been systematic. There is a growing concern around the need for a more systematic approach to the assessment of QF impact.

The EQF has a group of representatives – from QF bodies, institutions of learning, organised labour, employers, civil society and other organisations – from all 39 participating countries, which has discussed ways to assess the impact of QFs. While these discussions have by no means been conclusive, they have served to point to some of the broad issues and challenges involved. Some recognise for example, that the term ‘measurement’ might be problematic. Terms like ‘assessing’ and ‘monitoring’ are preferable, because not everything can be quantified.

QFs encompass different views and approaches. If the impact of a QF is going to be understood, this impact is often not in relation to one objective, but rather several, competing objectives. There is agreement around the importance of establishing a baseline from which to assess progress. CEDEFOP has started to work on a baseline for the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of QFs at national level in the European context, and also at Europe-level.

### ***Importance of establishing a baseline***

This paper seeks to elaborate on the kind of baseline to be used in assessing the impact of QFs at national level. The suggestion is that studies operate along two axes. There is a horizontal axis which relates to the four basic aspects expected of an operational QF: transparency; mobility in education and training, and in the labour market, and lifelong learning.

The vertical axis contains what are described as the key innovative and crucial elements of the NQFs. The areas of focus are: the explicit NQF level descriptors; the use of the learning outcomes principle; the comprehensiveness of the NQF/ extent to which all types and levels of qualifications are included; and stakeholder involvement.

It is possible for example, to explore the extent to which the NQF level descriptors are known and used in national systems for education, training, development and work. Are they referred to for instance, in national education, training and employment databases? The extent to which level descriptors are in use will speak to the degree to which the NQFs are operational, and used by their end-users. As already noted, the visibility of the

frameworks to end-users in the European context is not optimal, and it would be important to assess progress in this respect.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

There is a relationship between the lifelong learning that is central in NQF systems and the focus on learning in the SDGs. First, assessing the impacts of NQFs on lifelong learning could support assessing the achievement of related SDGs. The SDGs can also inspire the form of the baselines used to assess the impacts of NQFs.

So how then can QFs contribute to the global modernisation of education and training, and the holistic lifelong learning that is aspired to? Looking at the indicators suggested provides clues for the way forward. There are classical indicators linked to the statistical analysis of learner enrolment and completion rates. There is a second category of qualitative indicators that addresses the outcomes of education, training and lifelong learning: these indicators focus on learners' proficiency in literacy and numeracy, in language and mathematics, and other specialised competences – and are linked to learning outcomes.

There is also a third category of indicators which refer to the quality of learning programmes, and these require a different kind of assessment and monitoring. The question is: How we are going to do this kind of evaluation? Some of the work in the European context accomplished so far attempts to unpack this 'vertical' access. The focus on qualifications and learning outcomes, and on what learners understand, know, and can do, is directly relevant for measuring mastery and proficiency. The introduction of learning outcomes-based assessment provides a reference point for deciding the extent to which proficiency has been achieved. However, from now on the discussion needs to be operational.

In closing, it is emphasised that the majority of QFs worldwide – 140 or more – have yet to reach full operational status and maturity. It is not a given that all of these frameworks will reach stages where they add value to education and training policies and practices, and directly benefit learners and citizens. The uses of level descriptors and learning outcomes, and establishing baselines against which to assess progress against the objectives of NQFs in particular contexts, are however useful starting points.

# Intersections between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE)

*Dr Volker Rein*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) have been developed and implemented as reference instruments for the learning outcomes acquired in formal and other ways, there has been discussion around the consequences for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). Most of the sectoral and comprehensive frameworks have been developed to promote transparency, comparability, connectivity, and the quality assurance and quality development of credentials within and between education and training, in terms of competences and learning outcomes.

Higher Education and VET worldwide exist in many forms in terms of systems, institutional formations and conceptual approaches. This paper first discusses the societal and labour market drivers of the ongoing need for qualifications which are compatible across the two education systems. It then reasons conceptually around the implicit paradigmatic intersection between Higher Education and VET in terms of the competence and practice orientations. QFs as rising catalysts of across education and training compatibility are discussed. Finally, the paper supports a shift from a competitive system orientation to a compatible qualification concept orientation in the debate around the prospective shape of post-secondary education and training.

## DEMANDS AND TRENDS IN SOCIETIES AND LABOUR MARKETS: SEARCHING FOR APPROPRIATE AND COMPATIBLE QUALIFICATIONS ACROSS EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

The increasingly knowledge-based requirements in the manufacturing and service sectors in all countries require appropriate systemic and conceptual adaptations of post-secondary education and training to address the needs of societies, labor markets and learners engaging in lifelong learning. In many countries up to the present it has often been taken

for granted that Higher Education will play a dominant role in meeting these knowledge-driven demands. Higher Education is linked to the ongoing research-based growth of scientific knowledge, which significantly contributes to innovations in all segments of society and the economy, including VET. In fact, (trans) disciplinary knowledge, generic competences and the methodological skills acquired in academic programmes are constantly in demand in the labour market. Academic stakeholders require the higher levels of QFs for academic degrees.

And yet for some time Higher Education institutions have been under pressure to increase their accountability in terms of the quality of their degree programmes, and the employability of their graduates in non-academic labour markets. Employers complain about the lack of work experience in the design of academic programmes. On the other hand Higher Education stakeholders often fear that if Higher Education were made accountable in this way, it might become like vocational training, which could decrease its quality as academic education (Adelman, 2009). Conversely, in spite of the objectives of meeting the mid-level and advanced skills requirements of work-based settings, which in some sectors (such as Information Technology) increasingly have to be *underpinned* by science-related knowledge, the majority of VET programmes meet these requirements to minor extents.

The worldwide trend towards higher levels of qualifications for increasingly skilled workforces promotes discussion around the 'vocational professionalisation' that is increasingly connected to academic education (Raffe, 2003). In many countries the current debates around the pros and cons of the *academisation* of VET or the *vocationalisation* of Higher Education could be seen as being part of a converging trend towards designing qualifications at all levels based on the theory-practice linkages required for learner competence.

In the context of the Bologna Process for European Higher Education in 1999, the Copenhagen process for VET in 2002, and the Maastricht agreements for the comprehensive European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2004, the discussion up to the present regarding the common ground and differences between education and training has seen a qualitative leap through the competence-related *shift to learning outcomes* (Bjornavold, 2008).

## CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING QUALIFICATIONS IN VET AND HIGHER EDUCATION: INCREASING THE EXPLICITNESS OF THE PARADIGMATIC INTERSECTIONS OF THE COMPETENCE AND PRACTICE ORIENTATIONS

In many countries, numerous VET certificates are not substituting but are increasingly competing successfully against academic degrees in labour markets requiring advanced competence levels. The lack of common definitions and standards underlying occupational qualifications contributes to the considerable confusion about their value in the labour markets and how they relate to academic credentials. While degrees are generally portable and are designed to articulate towards subsequent educational credentials, the portability of VET certificates within education is limited. The portability of the latter usually depends on institutional articulation and transfer policies, and on employer requirements for hiring and promotion.

This paper assumes that a dichotomy between academic and occupational requirements does not exist per se. It asserts that on the contrary, in both education and training there are potentially compatible knowledge competence- and practice-related orientations for the *acquisition of the holistic competence* needed for problem-solving. This conceptualisation is a prerequisite for the development of compatible qualifications and permeable educational pathways between VET and Higher Education (Sloane *et al* 2004; Rein, 2012).

There are some conceptual differences that have to be taken into account when considering the compatibility of different forms of knowledge and practice. The design of qualifications in VET focuses on the demand for mid-level and managerial occupational skills; academic education traditionally focuses on scientific learning and enabling graduate and post-graduate career pathways. Universities have predominantly provided for the achievement of discipline-specific and knowledge-based competences, while VET has focused on the action-oriented capabilities required for occupational functions, tasks and processes. In different ways, understandings of practice are central reference points for the design of qualifications in both education and training. It was not until the 1999 Bologna Process for European Higher Education that the goal of including the *acquisition of occupational competence* in the design of academic degree programmes was explicitly agreed upon. The cultivation of the ability to *apply* scientific methodologies and findings is a pertinent conceptual anchor across all disciplines in Higher Education

– and these are also useful skills in occupational situations (Teichler, 2003).

Within the context of the action-oriented acquisition of competence in academic Higher Education, the traditional differentiation between science as a ‘cognitive complex’ on one hand and on the other hand practice as the quintessence of an action-related context outside of academia, begs critique (Wildt, 2007). The cognitive complex of science could be interpreted in relation to practice both inside and outside academia. The potential to generate and acquire competence in academic practice needs to be made explicit, in a way which both addresses the internal academic requirements and is transferable to non-academic action areas in all economic and societal sectors. In both education and training, generic competences are regarded as being essential prerequisites for the acquisition of holistic competence. Generic competences are based on knowledge, abilities and attitudes, which are multifunctional and versatile across domains (cf. Mertens, 1974).

Qualification types and programmes with competence-compatible curriculum and assessment designs – which address the requirements of both the occupational labour market and academic education and career pathways – will need to be monitored. Recent research into curricula which integrate theory and practice in traditional and embedded degree programmes (e.g. dual or short cycle programmes)<sup>47</sup> has confirmed the promising development potential of these qualification formats, for the cross-sector and action-oriented learning promoted by the shift to learning outcomes (Rein, 2014).

Higher Education programmes have to be regularly updated or revised based on the ongoing increase of research-generated disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge. How can academic knowledge and work experience be ‘bridged’ in appropriate systematic and learnable ways, such as ‘extended research-based learning’ or ‘action-research’? Programmes and qualifications in VET and Higher Education are expected to promote employability, whereas academic education traditionally sought to enable learning for its own sake, disciplinary learning, personal development and societal commitment. How will a more comprehensive concept of competence in a more labour

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<sup>47</sup> Dual studies refer to hybrid combinations of Higher Education and apprenticeship-based vocational Training. Short cycle programmes are typically practically-based, occupationally-specific and prepare learners for labour-market entry. These programmes may also provide pathways to tertiary programmes.

market-oriented approach fit in terms of a compatible academic-occupational qualification design?

## **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING: LEARNING OUTCOMES AS RISING CATALYSTS OF CROSS-SYSTEM COMPATIBILITY**

In facing the ongoing change in and the increasing requirements of, labor markets and society, comprehensive and sectoral QFs in many countries across all of the regions in the world promote transparency, comparability, and permeability as well as quality assurance and the development of quality credentials. These systems are facilitated by overarching structures, domains and levels which describe the requirements, competences and learning outcomes in common languages. QFs are used as central reference instruments in the evaluation of competence-oriented equivalence and comparability within and between VET and Higher Education, and for qualifications development processes in education and training (Rein, 2015).

### ***The development of appropriate level descriptors***

The development of situation-neutral level descriptors written at a level of generalisation that speaks to academic, occupational, and holistic competences is crucial for the success of existing and prospective QFs as overarching reference instruments. In other words, the descriptors need to speak to both the academic and workplace contexts.

The sectoral frameworks for Business Administration and Economic Engineering in Germany comprise examples of level descriptors designed in an integrated academic-occupational way (German Rectors Conference (HRK), 2012). This integration enables the development of curricula, learning outcomes, and assessment that align with different education and training pathways. Overarching level descriptors based on an integrated domain concept have also been developed in the Credentials Framework (Lumina Foundation, 2015) for the United States (US).

### ***Other integration tools***

The development of competence-oriented credit transfer processes within and across VET and Higher Education would enable the assessment and comparability of prior

learning, such as that achieved in academic associate degrees and apprenticeship programmes, for the benefit of education and training institutions, learners, employers, and employees.

Sectoral and comprehensive QFs could also engage with, clarify, and possibly fine-tune, traditional concepts such as those of *degree*, *certificate*, *occupation* and *profession* in the interests of holistic, competence-driven orientations to articulated credentials. Care would need to be taken in this work, to respect and not blur education- and training-specific characteristics<sup>48</sup>.

### ***Qualifications frameworks as catalysts for integration***

QFs have potential to operate as across-sector (VET-HE) catalysts that facilitate the development of mutual trust in post-secondary education and training. The success of QFs in countries, regions and worldwide in terms of enabling compatibility between VET and Higher Education includes but is not determined solely by advanced construction and design. The policy and system objectives are also central for this purpose, as is the engagement of stakeholders in the education and training sectors, in the research sphere, and in government organisations, in the (re)development and implementation of the instruments required.

In turn, the functionality of these instruments in terms of VET-HE compatibility depends on perspectives that include labour market or holistic orientations – visions that take into account broader societal, cultural and personal needs. This approach holds for all QF development, whether at sectoral, national, regional or global levels. VET and Higher Education to date have been separately developed in various ways, in all countries. Voluntary, non-compulsory QFs may provide the flexibility to facilitate sustainable relationships between qualifications located in the two systems of education and training.

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48 The NQFPedia developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in collaboration with the three Quality Councils that oversee the three coordinated Sub-Frameworks of the South African NQF, is an example of the results of this kind of dialogue. The NQFPedia lists common NQF terminology in South Africa, providing over-arching (SAQA) as well as Quality Council-specific definitions for each term.

## **OUTLOOK-SHIFT FROM A COMPETITIVE SYSTEM ORIENTATION TO A COMPATIBLE QUALIFICATION CONCEPT ORIENTATION IN TERMS OF COMPETENCE AND PRACTICE: CLOSING COMMENTS**

In this paper, the relationships between VET and High Education have been discussed in terms of the competence-oriented compatibility of qualifications. The inherent conceptual intersection of the education and training approaches in the qualification goal of acquiring competence as the *capability* to act has been discussed in the context of labour market and system-framing aspects.

The paper asserts that the shift to learning outcomes, and addressing the compatibility of both academic and occupational requirements in the development of qualifications, will make the *capability* to act across the education and training systems more explicit. This explicitness would make visible, the intersection of the VET and Higher Education approaches. In terms of the quality development of qualifications and programmes, this visibility might be further promoted by integrated learning outcome concepts based on the theory-practice linkages in 'traditional' as well as in 'embedded' degree programmes which integrate academic and work-based learning (eg. as 'dual study').

### ***Questions to be addressed***

Central questions for further consideration include how this objective can be achieved in the design and development of qualifications while avoiding the loss of education and training system characteristics and identity, and achieving the convergence needed to enable 'permeability' and learning pathways that meet socio-economic needs. Which competence indicators and criteria are appropriate for the design of learning outcomes that addresses occupational and academic requirements in compatible ways? What is their conceptual and theoretical foundation? What are some of the ways in which the academic (theoretical) and non-academic (occupational experience-based) knowledges can be 'bridged' and operationalised for hybrid learning without loss of quality? What are the conceptual and instrumental consequences of the 'compatible competence orientation' for the recognition of occupational competences in academic programmes, and for promoting the permeability of learning pathways? What are appropriate principles for quality assurance and the quality development of credentials which are based on the

compatible learning outcomes approach? Will professional domains such as Business Administration be more relevant for an across-system orientation, than other domains? Finally, questions around the appropriate policies and cultural conditions needed to enable this conceptual shift towards qualification redesign in both education and training would need to be addressed – for the benefit of the societies and labour markets involved, as well as for the individual citizens and learners.

### ***In closing***

Comprehensive and sectoral QFs worldwide already play major roles as reference instruments for the transparency and comparability of both VET and Higher Education qualifications. Being essential mechanisms in the conceptual shift to learning outcomes in education and training, QFs are likely to continue to play catalytic functions in the promotion of conceptual compatibility and the development of common languages across education and training. The recently developed World Reference Levels (United National Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2015) in support of a global zone of mutual trust in education and training might have the potential to promote improved links between the education and training systems along the lines discussed in this paper.

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**CONCLUDING COMMENTS  
BY THE EDITORIAL TEAM**



## Concluding Comments by the Editorial Team

*Dr Heidi Bolton, Dr Julie Reddy, Mr Joe Samuels, Dr Sazi Kunene, Ms Tshidi Leso, Ms Coleen Jaftha*

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Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) are universally accepted as key mechanisms for the integration of education and training systems within sectors, countries, regions, and globally. They are multi-purpose education and training reform instruments, and are used by increasing numbers of countries in the search for systems appropriate for both social development and the highly skilled workforces needed in current global knowledge-based economies.

QFs differ in terms of their purposes, objectives, structures, and forms, but share the goal of establishing links between the parts of systems. In this QFs are 'relational devices' – they are mechanisms to relate previously silo-like parts of the systems for education, training, development and work. They require the development of 'relational agency', or the willingness to engage with the motives and traditions of others and to proceed on the basis of the common understanding developed as a result of this engagement.

The papers in this Bulletin reflect the topics presented and discussed at SAQA's recent international seminar on qualifications frameworks (QFs). The first set of papers focused mainly on showcasing QF developments and some of the related successes achieved over the past 20 years. The second group of articles contextualised QFs in global developments, including the urgent need to assess the impact of QFs. The third set of papers provided pointers for further QF implementation and development, at sectoral, national, regional, and global levels. These concluding comments seek to draw out the highlights, common threads, and specific insights gained through the seminar.

### **GROWTH IN NUMBERS OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

One realisation that emerged in the seminar was the steady growth in the numbers of QFs that exist: almost two thirds of countries in the world have QFs at sectoral or national levels. In the first paper, Singh and Deij traced the history and exponential

growth in the numbers of QFs. They described the changes in character across the different generations of QFs, showing how initially, QF development was driven mainly by internal factors and how over time, the communication between QF entities has increased, and external drivers linked to the recognition of credentials *across* contexts have come to the fore.

In Paper 4 Bjornavold provided an overview of QF development in Europe. In considering the characteristics needed for the sustainability of the European QFs, Bjornavold pointed to the centrality of having sound mandates or legal bases, the active and committed involvement of stakeholders, and visibility to end-users – aspects also highlighted in the other papers in this volume.

## **INCREASED USE OF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

A second set of milestones identified in the Singh and Deij, Bjornavold, and Rein papers, included the steady increase, across countries, in the use of QF level descriptors and learning outcomes. There were also insights into the nature of learning outcomes. Importantly, learning outcomes should not be formulated in narrow and restricted ways, which could limit rather than broaden lifelong learning. In some contexts research is needed to deepen the conceptualization of skills so that understandings are not confined only to productive skills, but also address other areas of human capabilities.

In his description of the increased demands for ‘relevance’ and ‘employability’ – or ‘vocationalisation’ – in HE, and the increasing need for ‘scientific’ knowledge – or ‘academisation’ – in VET, Rein suggested that discussion in this regard had advanced because of the shift to learning outcomes. Bjornavold emphasised the importance of promoting the use of learning outcomes.

## **TOWARDS AND BEYOND NQFs: SECTORAL, NATIONAL, AND EMERGING REGIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL QFs**

In Paper 6, Phoolchund sketched the development of a sectoral qualifications framework (SQF) in context, by describing the Mauritian experience in re-engineering qualifications in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector.

The Mauritius QF serves as an instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies in line with level descriptors. It is used to indicate the comparability of qualifications, and progression possibilities. It has been instrumental in driving RPL for empowerment and lifelong learning. Within this QF, progression pathways needed to be designed within a particular sector – the ECD sector. Paper 6 shows how, within NQFs, sectors can be strengthened through the development of SQFs – especially when there is a need to strengthen learning and work pathways in the sector, and/or when a sector needs to be professionalised, upgraded, or reconceptualised.

SQF development in Mauritius commenced with the development of a matrix of qualifications and led to the identification of four clear progression pathways. This fine example of strengthening an NQF ‘from the inside’ has enabled Mauritius to spearhead a regional quality enhancement initiative.

Singh and Deij noted the emergence of an increasing number of regional and transnational QFs. These structures have relied on the inter-national tuning and across-country referencing of national level descriptors.

## **ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS**

The importance of assessing the impact or effectiveness of NQFs was addressed in the papers by Singh and Deij, Bolton and Samuels, and Bjornavold.

### ***Enhancing impact***

Singh and Deij reported that the outcomes of NQFs depend on how well they are aligned to national education and training systems. To maximize their effectiveness, NQFs need to be well-integrated into the policy baskets of which they are part. While instruments and approaches are transferable across countries, policies and systems are not; they are culturally and socially embedded.

Singh and Deij noted that the imprints of NQFs also depend on the use of learning outcomes to promote clarity and transparency in systems, and to enhance participation through the relevance of learning programmes. Caution around the hazards of narrowness in learning outcomes, and the need for learning outcomes to broaden lifelong learning,

have been noted. These findings are linked to the potential of QFs, to enhance system reform; harmonise and systematise national systems; provide second- and subsequent-chance learning and work pathways, and make these opportunities visible.

### ***Methodologies for assessing the impact of QFs***

Large NQF impact studies have been conducted in Scotland, Ireland, and Australia. Bolton and Samuels also reported considerable work towards assessing the impact of the South African NQF, the recent studies using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) – which complements the insights revealed by Bjornavold in Papers 4 and 7. The use of CHAT in the South African study provided tools for assessing the impact of interacting sub-systems.

Bjornavold claimed that the impact of QFs could be seen *generally*. It is visible for example, in the widespread shifts to learning outcomes, enhanced stakeholder interaction, institutional reforms towards transparency, the bridging of education and training systems, the opening up to the private and informal sectors, and the recognition of qualifications across contexts. For the sustainability of QFs however, this impact needs to be assessed in more systematic ways.

In Paper 4, Bjornavold raised important specific questions around *how* the impact of QFs could be assessed. In Paper 7 he expanded on these ideas. Drawing on the recent work of the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG), he clarified some of the agreed evaluation principles. Assessing the impact of QFs needs to be understood within the broader political and institutional contexts of the frameworks, and should not be reduced to a question of simple 'objective' causality. In addition, the assessment methodology must be able to capture the informed interpretations and opinions of the main stakeholders involved. Further, measuring the impact of a QF requires a robust and agreed-upon baseline. Such baselines must refer to the key objectives of the frameworks in question. Development of the baselines needs to involve clarification of the developmental stages reached, in order to provide realistic starting points for the national assessments.

The actual draft baseline provided in Paper 4 is useful for other sectors, countries, and regions seeking to assess the impact of their QFs. Bjornavold's mention of the preference – amongst EQF members – for the term 'assessment' over 'measurement'

of impact, in order to describe the types of quantitative and qualitative analysis used for QFs as complex social systems, echoes that in the 2014 South African NQF Impact Study reported by Bolton and Samuels

## **NQFs ENHANCING SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION**

Bolton and Samuels started Paper 2 by sketching the highly uneven, race-based social realities inherited by the new democracy in South Africa in 1994, where the majority of people in the country had been denied access to quality education and training, developmental opportunities and work. The NQF was chosen as the means to transform the system in the new democracy – Bolton and Samuels' paper shows that in this, South Africa was much like many other 'transitioning' countries. In implementing the NQF, a single integrated national system was achieved. Over time, the relatively top-down newly centralised system was replaced with a differentiated, coordinated one where communication and collaboration were foregrounded.

The South African NQF opened access and created a single integrated quality assurance system. Extensive information about the system is accessible. The extent to which the system has transformed is suggested by the current priorities identified by Bolton and Samuels, which focus on *fine-tuning* quality, flexibility, coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, economy, and the simplification of the NQF rather than the need for change in direction. The national coordination and funding of RPL, and strengthening learning pathways and articulation in general, currently key in South Africa, were also noted by Bjornavold as being of central importance in the EQF context. Bjornavold mentioned specifically, the need to deepen integration, enhance visibility, promote the further use of learning outcomes, orient quality assurance with a view to comparison across systems, and increase the recognition/validation of non-formal/informal learning.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS AS CATALYSTS FOR CONNECTIVITY**

In Paper 8, Rein, following Singh and Deij, Bjornavold, and Al Mehairi – pointed to the commonalities between QFs, which include enhancing the transparency, comparability, connectivity, quality assurance, learning outcomes, and permeability in education and training systems. He suggested that the current 'vocationalisation' in Higher Education, and 'academicisation' in VET may signify convergence towards qualifications designed

for 'holistic competences' based on a theory-practice balance. Rein also pressed for the dichotomy between academic and vocational knowledge to be critiqued, since in both education and training, generic competences are multi-faceted and applicable across boundaries. On one hand, VET certificates are competing successfully against academic degrees in labour market contexts that require advanced competence levels; on the other hand, degrees are usually more portable.

Rein pointed to the potential of QFs to enable, and act as catalysts for, the competence-oriented comparability between VET and HE offerings. In order to be such reference instruments, they need level descriptors written in such a way that they speak respectfully to both the academic and vocational contexts; competence-oriented credit transfer processes, and a healthy respect for the different characters of education and training.

## **IMPORTANCE OF EXTENDED TIME, STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT, AND INCLUSIVITY**

Singh and Deij emphasized that the implementation of NQFs requires multi-year processes. This reality also emerged clearly in the NQF impact study work reported in the Bjornavold, and Bolton and Samuels papers. Bjornavold contended that the majority of QFs worldwide have yet to reach maturity and full operational status. In Paper 5, Al Mahairi sketched the background to, and the nature and development of, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Qualifications Framework (*QFEmirates*), showing how developments towards 'advanced operational status', have been achieved, and will continue to be achieved, over time.

Al Mahairi noted that the *QFEmirates* implementation challenges experienced were similar to those in other countries. They included for example, shifting to a learning outcomes approach, insufficient dialogue between the UAE's VET and Higher Education sectors, implementing the NQF across all sectors, and low awareness of the *QFEmirates*. As the UAE seeks to move more fully into the 'advanced operational stage', it is embarking on *inter alia* incremental understanding of its own needs and the capacity to deliver against these needs; policy integration; continuing to integrate national planning instruments into operations; ongoing promotion of the *QFEmirates* via awareness programmes; the wider engagement of stakeholders; enhancing the recognition of non-formal and informal learning; and supporting lifelong learning and the access to learning pathways for marginalised groups. These foci echo those currently key for the EQF

(Bjornavold) and South Africa (Bolton and Samuels).

Singh and Deij noted that securing trusted qualifications requires stable and enduring arrangements, in particular stakeholder ownership; proportionate legislation; institutions with effective capacities, and reliable quality assurance mechanisms. Developments over the past 20 years have shown that NQF policy and practice, as well as taking place across extended time, require a culture of exchange and debate.

While noting the importance of not sacrificing quality in the pursuit of access, Singh and Deij pointed to the centrality of the principle of inclusivity, in the justification of NQFs. While the development of NQFs in many countries had been influenced by economic considerations, there had been equal appreciation by governments, of establishing through NQFs, empowerment tools, processes to recognise non-formal and informal learning, and the development of learning pathways for marginalised groups.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS WITHIN THE NEW GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR 2030**

In Paper 3, Chakroun considered the major trends impacting on QFs – including the drivers that support or trigger changes in labour markets, education and training, economies, and society in general. Chakroun's paper touched on the sustainable development agenda, what qualifications mean in and for this agenda, and what the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is trying to do in this context.

### ***Polarisation and access***

Chakroun drew attention to the polarisation of the labour market – to indications that there will be high and increasing numbers of people who are low-skilled, and similarly high and increasing numbers who are high-skilled, while the numbers of those with intermediate skills-levels are shrinking. These realities have implications for the kinds of qualifications needed: QFs, for example, need to ensure learning pathways for high skills levels, and that pathways lead from the lowest levels.

## ***Centrality of TVET; rights to education; mobility across borders***

Chakroun highlighted a number of UNESCO's focal areas, which include updating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education conventions in order to position TVET centrally in the field of learning; implementing normative instruments on the 'Right to Education', and working with its stakeholders to advance and support the mobility of learners across borders.

## ***Alignment with the New Global Framework 2030***

Chakroun called attention in Paper 3, to the opportunity to leverage the momentum that has been created by the Education 2030 agenda, and the call for sustainable development, and to reinforce all of the partnerships involved in order to enlist the potential of QFs to contribute to this agenda.

## **CLOSING COMMENTS**

The paper by Singh and Deij is useful for *contextualizing* the development, scope, and foci of QFs. The fact that it is an overview, and also a sketch of what has happened over time, provides a picture that makes visible, the positioning of QFs – be they sectoral, national or regional. The paper by Bolton and Samuels provides a detailed picture of the steady development of an NQF over time. Similarly, Phoolchund details the development of an SQF, and Al Mehairi, development towards the 'advanced operational status' of an NQF. The whole-country learning experienced and shared in each of these instances may be useful for other countries.

Rein's paper provides clear pointers for the relational work needed in integrated systems. His critiques of the relationships between VET and Higher Education address articulation issues. Chakroun's paper effectively serves as a call to all QFs, to be part of global integration initiatives – not only to enable the mobility of learners and workers for the economic benefit of countries, but also for ethical developmental, and sustainable development reasons. Bjornavold's papers provide strong pointers for any sectors, countries, or regions seeking to assess the impact of their QFs.

The papers in this volume make clear that QFs are here to stay. Key over-arching lessons can be learned from these across-context experiences. First, looking across

the articles reveals differences across contexts. QFs cannot be 'transplanted' across contexts given the embedded-ness of education and training systems, in particular cultures and economies. Commonalities across QFs also emerge clearly when considering the papers together. The papers speak to the links between QFs and socio-economic development, as well as links to more holistic community and personal, development. The papers also speak of the use of level descriptors and learning outcomes; progression/learning pathways and lifelong learning; quality; access; redress and the recognition of informal and non-formal learning, and the importance of the visibility of QFs.

The second over-arching lesson emerging relates to the need to evaluate the impact of QFs, and to the methodologies for going about these impact assessments.

The third over-arching lesson concerns the need to address system-alignment, and the importance of stakeholder involvement for the development and implementation of QFs, whether at sectoral, national, or regional levels. Relational agency is needed in the implementation of QFs as relational mechanisms.

It is hoped that readers will find the papers in the volume useful, and build on the insights presented, to build the transparency, quality, access, redress, progression, and lifelong learning in systems everywhere.



## Author Information

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### **DR THANI AL MEHAIRI**

His Excellency Dr Thani Al Mehairi was appointed in 2012 as the first Director General of the United Arab Emirates National Qualifications Authority (UAE NQF), to take responsibility for the establishment and implementation of the UAE NQF, together with all of the associated policies and procedures. The UAE NQF is an umbrella for the development, classification, and recognition of all qualifications within the UAE's education and training sectors. Drawing upon 20 years of experience across various educational sectors, Dr Thani succeeded in developing the key policies and procedures for the unification of qualifications titles, placement of qualifications at the appropriate levels of the UAE NQF, performance and review of quality assurance processes, career education and advice, assessment, Core Life Skills, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), equivalency arrangements, and qualification outcomes for employment relevance, bringing together the key strategic partners within the three streams of the UAE education and training sectors in order to consult and agree on the common work to promote the learning outcomes and enhance the relationships between qualifications and labour market requirements.

Within the international field, Dr Thani led the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Team to develop, and later on to adopt, the Gulf Qualifications Framework, a meta-framework that works as a translation device for the development and referencing of GCC national frameworks. He also succeeded in achieving the first ever referencing process within the whole region between the UAE's qualifications framework and leading international qualifications frameworks, such as the United Kingdom Qualifications and Credit Framework (UK QCF), the UK Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (UK FHEQ), and the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF). Prior to this work, Dr Thani assumed several key positions at both federal and local levels, including, but not limited to, his position as the head of the UAE Military Colleges Committee where he played a leading role in establishing the UAE National Defence College and facilitating the adoption of certified Bachelors and Masters qualifications across military colleges in the UAE; within the Abu Dhabi Education Council and as the Director of Continuous Education at the UAE University, where he established continuous education policy

which was considered the first within Arab universities to be attested by the Council of Continuous Education in the GCC and adopted by the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain. Dr Thani also established research collaborations between universities in the UAE and international organisations, such as between Al Ain University and LG Korea, and the distance Masters programmes at Michigan State University. In 2013, the UAE Federal Cabinet appointed Dr Thani as the Deputy Minister of Labour. Dr Thani also chairs the National Teacher Licencing Committee and is a member of the Board of the Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute. He has received several awards for appreciation from local government and international organisations, as well as the Prize of Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed in 1997 and 2003 and an achievement prize from the National Students Union in Washington, USA. He adopts innovative approaches to providing educational services to employees in both government and private sector organisations, and has invented a series of training programmes such as the Digital Emirati, and Mathematics for Life, as well as increasing awareness of self-learning through easy education cards that were later adopted by Etisalat. Dr Thani holds a PhD in Human Resources and Community Development from the University of Ohio.

### **MR JENS BJORNAVOLD**

Mr Jens Bjornavold has been working with European and international education and training issues since the mid-1990s and has held posts both in the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the European Commission. He is currently the Brussels representative of CEDEFOP, located in the European Commission, in the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs. Mr Bjornavold has been involved in developing and implementing the European Union Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Copenhagen Process in Vocational Education and Training, the Europass, and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). In recent years he has also been involved in developing European terminology for skills, competences and occupations (ESCO). Mr Bjornavold has coordinated and carried out numerous research projects, notably on national qualifications frameworks, the use of learning outcomes in education and training policies and practices, the changing roles of qualifications and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. He is currently responsible for a major European study on the 'changing role and nature of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe', which includes 30 countries.

**DR HEIDI BOLTON**

Dr Heidi Bolton is the Research Director at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Her responsibilities include SAQA's long-term Research Partnerships for National Qualifications Framework (NQF) implementation and further development in South Africa, and assessing the impact of this NQF; oversight of research-related development work, and research capacity development in the NQF system. Dr Bolton was previously Senior Researcher at Umalusi. She led Umalusi's 2008 Maintaining Standards project – research which compared standards in the transition from the old pre-democracy system with its Senior Certificate (matric exams) to the first National Senior Certificate (NSC) exams linked to the new outcomes based National Curriculum Statements. Findings of this research were used in the standardisation of the first NSC exams, and its analytical tools have been and continue to be used in a variety of academic and vocational curriculum comparison studies. Dr Bolton has also worked as a publisher of school and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) textbooks; lectured curriculum theory, and taught school and adult learners for many years. Her research interests include coordination and collaboration in national education and training systems; curriculum and knowledge; sociology of education and training, and specialised modes of pedagogy. She holds a PhD degree in the Sociology of Education from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa.

**MR BORHENE CHAKROUN**

Mr Borhene Chakroun is an engineer. He holds a PhD in Education Sciences from Bourgogne University in France. His academic work focuses on the recognition and validation of prior learning and qualifications. Mr Chakroun worked, during the 1990s, as trainer, chief trainer, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) project manager. He has also worked as a short-term consultant for the European Union, World Bank and other international organisations before coming to the European Training Foundation (ETF) in 2001. At the ETF, Mr Chakroun worked as a Senior Human Capital Development specialist. He has also coordinated the ETF's community of practice on National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition of Qualifications. He is currently head of the section that oversees TVET at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and is leading the implementation of the UNESCO TVET Strategy adopted in 2009. He coordinated the organisation of the Third International Congress on TVET in Shanghai in 2012. He has authored and

co-authored various articles and books in the fields of TVET and the recognition of qualifications. Much of his most recent work focuses on global trends in reforming TVET and qualifications systems.

### **MR. ARJEN DEIJ**

Mr Arjen Deij has worked for the European Training Foundation (ETF) since 1995, as a senior expert on qualifications systems. He has also worked in Higher Education (HE) and in Vocational Education and Training (VET). Mr Deij led the ETF work on occupational standards in the late nineties. He was a member of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Expert Working Group and the EQF Advisory Group. He has been directly involved in the development of the qualifications frameworks in Romania, England, Wales and Northern Ireland (on secondment from ETF) and is currently providing support for the reform of the qualifications systems in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Ukraine. He has been following qualifications framework development internationally for many years and has published regularly about them. His work can be accessed via the ETF Qualifications Platform ([www.qualificationsplatform.net](http://www.qualificationsplatform.net)), a community of more than 700 experts involved in the reform of qualifications systems.

### **MR. ROBIN PHOOLCHUND**

Mr Robin Phoolchund is currently the Ag. Director of the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA). He holds a Bachelor of Engineering and a Master of Business Administration with a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Development. After graduating from university, Mr Phoolchund worked as an engineer in the manufacturing and services sector before joining the former Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB), now the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD), where he held office as Divisional, Manager: Quality Assurance. When the MQA was created in 2002, Mr Phoolchund joined as the Deputy Director & Registrar. In this capacity, he has been at the heart of the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in Mauritius. On the international front, he has been much involved with the development of a Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) for the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). In 2009-10, he was the Director of the 'Espace des Métiers' (EDM), a project based on the model of the International Network of Cités de Métiers, under the

National Empowerment Foundation (NEF).

### **DR VOLKER REIN**

Dr Volker Rein is an education specialist in education and training system policy development, including the skills requirements in Germany, in the European Union (EU) and in the United States (US). On behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) he is working as a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Professional Learning and Teaching at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in Bonn, Germany.

Dr Rein has long-term experience in research and development work, as well as in advisory work on competence-oriented qualification standards and transparency instruments (qualifications frameworks [QFs], Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL], credit transfer, *etcetera*) in Germany and in the European Union. In this regard Dr Rein has been involved in the implementation of the Bologna Framework (EHEA) at university level (FU Berlin) and in the development and testing of the German and the European Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning (in terms of formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes) since 2004. He represented the BMBF in the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group and in the Expert Cluster 'Recognition on Learning Outcomes' at the European Commission (DG EAC). In this field his special focus in research and development has been on the intersection of, and the compatibility potential between, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education, with reference to competence and proficiency. In this respect he has contributed to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) activities around the promotion of learning outcomes in the EU and to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Reference Levels, to connect regional qualifications frameworks globally. Dr Rein also advised the Lumina Foundation for Education in the development of the US Degree Qualifications Profile for Higher Education in 2010-13. He contributed to the development of a Credentials Framework for the US that addresses both degree and non-degree credentials in terms of the general construction and the descriptor compatibility for VET and Higher Education credentials, in 2013-15. Prior to his work in education and training Dr Rein worked as a social anthropological researcher and advisor in development programmes in Southern Africa and in Cape Verde. He holds PhD and MA degrees in the Social Sciences from the Free University of Berlin.

## **MR JOE SAMUELS**

Mr Joe Samuels has been the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) since 1 March 2012. He holds a BSc (Hons) and an MPhil degree from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in South Africa. He is a specialist in Educational Policy and Education Change, Qualifications Frameworks, Standards Setting, Quality Assurance and Adult and Community Education. He has worked in a medical laboratory, as a teacher, and Physiology lecturer at UWC, and for 10 years before joining SAQA, as the Coordinator of Continuing Education Programmes at the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at UWC. He was the Director for Standards Setting and Development at SAQA before being promoted to the position of Deputy Executive Officer, a position he held for seven years before being promoted to the CEO position. He has been working at SAQA for the past 19 years.

Mr Samuels has organised and participated in many national and international seminars and conferences where he has delivered various papers *inter alia* on National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), the generation of qualifications and standards, quality assurance in education and training, the integration of education and training, human rights and the NQF, and NQFs in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, on the African continent, and globally. Recently he served as the chairperson of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Drafting Team for the Addis Convention, a document on the recognition of foreign qualifications that allows for the movement of learners, academics and workers across borders, that was adopted by 54 African States in December 2014. He served as an Expert on the UNESCO Panel of Experts for development of the Global Convention for the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education and for Level Descriptors.

Mr Samuels serves on the councils of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, the National Skills Authority (NSA), and the board of SAQA. He serves on various committees and task teams including those for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Worker Education, and others. He is the Deputy Chairperson of the UWC Alumni Association in the Gauteng province.

**DR MADHU SINGH**

Dr Madhu Singh is the Senior Programme Specialist at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, Germany. She is currently working in the Institute's programme for Lifelong Learning Policies and Strategies (LLPS) and is responsible for the Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Frameworks, which is a joint venture between UNESCO, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Dr Singh also works in developing UIL's Global Observatory on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Non-formal and Informal Learning. Her publications and research interests are in the field of adult learning and the world of work; skills development for the informal sector; youth transitions; linking recognition practices and qualifications frameworks; green skills and their inclusion in recognition practices; and the recognition of non-formal education and learning for Syrian Refugees in the Arab States.



## Acronyms

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ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AET	Adult Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Network
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
B: ECD	Bachelor in Early Childhood Development
BIBB	Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
BSc	Bachelor of Science
BSc [Hons]	Bachelor of Science [Honours]
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPECD	Certificate of Proficiency: Early Childhood Development
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DCEO	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
DG	Director General
DGS	Department of General Services
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DPSA	Department of Public Service Administration
ECCEA	Early Childhood Care and Education Authority Act
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
EFA	Education for All

EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EPWP	Extended Public Works Programme
EQF	European Qualifications Authority
EQFAG	European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
FHEQ	Framework(s) for Higher Education Qualifications
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
GDN	Groningen Declaration Network
GE	General Education
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
GINRQF	Global Inventory of National and Regional Qualifications Framework
GQF	Gulf Qualifications Framework
HE	Higher Education
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
ICF	International Coach Federation
ICQN	Inter-Country Quality Node
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MBE	Minister of Basic Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MHET	Minister of Higher Education and Training
MIE	Mauritius Institute of Education
MITD	Mauritius Institute of Training and Development
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPSA	Minister of Public Service Administration
MQA	Mauritius/ Malaysian Qualifications Authority
MQF	Mauritius/ Malaysian Qualifications Framework
NCV	National Certificate: Vocational
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework

NSB	National Standards Body
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMEP	Organisation Mondiale pour L'Education Prescolaire
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PWP	Public Works Programme
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
QF	Qatar Foundation/ Qualifications Framework
QF EHEA	Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area
QF <i>Emirates</i>	Qualifications Framework for the Emirates
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RVA	Recognition, Validation and Accreditation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAFCERT	South African Certification Council
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SQF	Sectoral Qualifications Framework
TAFE	Diploma in Early Childhood
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UK FHEQ	United Kingdom Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications
UK QCF	United Kingdom Qualifications and Credit Framework

UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States
USA	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETAC	Vocational Education and Training Awards Council
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth
WGECD	Working Group: Early Childhood Development
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation





Telephone: 012 431 5000

Facsimile: 012 431 5147

Helpdesk: 086 010 3188

Website: [www.saqqa.org.za](http://www.saqqa.org.za)

Email: [saqainfo@saqa.org.za](mailto:saqainfo@saqa.org.za)