

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Unlike the other development areas, which are concerned with quite practical matters, [integration] is still at a conceptual level. It is suggested, however, that it is of considerable symbolic importance and that there is a need to clarify and come to a common understanding of the notion of an integrative approach. The question of what ‘integration’ really means has been with the NQF since its inception and remains a barrier to achieving consensus on the direction the NQF should take¹.

This study aims to investigate the extent to which the South African education and training system reflects in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework. It examines the uses and meaning of ‘integration’ through a number of lenses. The first and second lenses are of policy symbolism, reflecting a particular ideology and a philosophy of the education and training system emerging from the legacy of apartheid. The third, fourth and fifth lenses view integration from the perspective of pragmatic and technical approaches that embody the philosophy underpinning the system, specifically by examining the relationships between sub-systems, levels and types of qualifications registered on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF). The sixth and seventh lenses are used to view the extent to which the macro sub-systems, namely education and training, converge and increasingly become complementary and the ways in which espoused policy is enabled at the level of institutions and classrooms in curricula and learning programmes.

The central research problem is discussed in 1.1. This is followed by a discussion of the purposes and significance of the study for the implementation of an integrated national qualifications framework in South Africa (1.2). The research questions are briefly introduced in 1.3. In 1.4, the characteristics of the study are described. Finally, the structure of this dissertation is outlined in the conclusion of this chapter (1.5)

¹ SAQA, 2005, p. 87

1.1 Problem in its Context

In 2001, only six years after the promulgation of an Act of Parliament that intended to completely overhaul the South African education and training system the then Ministers of Education and Labour, Minister Kader Asmal and Minister Membathisi Mdladlana, called for a review of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF). The Study Team responsible for the review was given ‘a clear brief by the Ministers of Education and Labour to recommend ways in which the implementation of South Africa’s National Qualifications Framework, established in terms of the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995, could be streamlined and accelerated’ (Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Labour (DoL), 2002, p. i). This stemmed from ‘strong consensus on the many problems of implementing the NQF’. These problems included the pace of implementation, the complexity of structures and language and the apparent lack of leadership at all levels of the system ‘despite this being the flagship project of the democratic government’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. ii). Amongst other recommendations emanating from the review, the recommendation that ‘the policy on integration of education and training should be reaffirmed and elaborated’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. iii), is the central concern of this study. The idea of an integrated national qualifications framework came to embody the new government’s strategy to overcome major divisions inherited from the apartheid system, namely racial divisions in the management, funding and resources within and across education and training sub-systems; divisions between sectors of learning, for example general education and training and adult basic education; and the divisions between theory, seen to be in the domain of academic qualifications and application, associated with vocational and occupationally based training. These divisions were seen to be inhibiting the progression and the concomitant life opportunities of learners, particularly learners in previously oppressed communities, within the system. Thus, ‘the integration of the education and training systems to ensure maximum flexibility for horizontal and vertical mobility between different levels of the education and training system, both formal and in-formal’ (Education Department, African National Congress, 1994, p. 5), was seen as a solution to the many social ills associated with the apartheid regime. Education ‘was for a long time a major source of discontent in apartheid South Africa, and was often a rallying point in

the broader struggle against it' (Allias, 2003, p. 307). An integrated framework was thus meant to remove disparities of esteem, give value to learning wherever it may occur and aid in progression within education and training. Yet, while all public statements about the SANQF affirm the centrality of an integrated framework, and while there is 'this huge buy-in to the objectives...everything from the body of the article or the paper goes on to split [an integrated framework] up' (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 20).

This was the central puzzle that led to this inquiry. Why, if an integrated framework is so widely supported, both politically and at all other levels of the system, is there no real progress in achieving integration? Is it because some policies are not intended to change practice? (Jansen, 2004). In other words, could the policy on integration be a symbol - an important symbol - but one that nonetheless was never intended to effect any large-scale changes in the education and training system? Is this the reason for the apparent intention to reverse the policy on integration? Or are there other (non-political, non-emotionally charged) reasons for the difficulties experienced in attempting to implement this first objective of the SANQF? And, if so, are these difficulties unique to South Africa, given its legacy of an unjust and inequitable system?

1.2 Purposes and Significance of the Study

It is with these puzzles in mind that the study aimed to determine *to what extent the South African education and training system reflects in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework*. The purpose of this study was thus firstly, to understand integration:

One of the reasons for the limited progress in the achievement of this objective is that there does not seem to be a common understanding of what is meant when we talk about "an integrated framework". The consequence of this lack of understanding is that the drivers of the NQF and their partners have interpreted this concept in different ways (Heyns & Needham, 2004, p. 30).

Secondly, the study aimed to determine what the inhibitors are that may be preventing this principle from being implemented. Many commentators blame the non-achievement of integration on the lack of political will, 'this divide between education and labour'

(SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 22). This is understandable as even the Minister of Labour, Minister Membathisi Mdladlana, in a speech at the Northwest Growth and Development Summit in August 2004, voiced his apparent frustration with the lack of progress in this regard ‘All we are doing is fighting for turf. There is a need to have education and training under one roof’ (Cape Times, 31 August 2004, p. 6).

The political impasse that has been stretching over a period of more than four years since the review of the SANQF in 2001/2002, is real and important, particularly in relation to the principle of integration. ‘The feature of the [SANQF] that most distinguishes it from other systems is its location in the political and social transformation of South Africa’ (Granville, 2004, p. 4). The awareness that ‘participants in the NQF are imbued by the ideals and the rhetoric of the project’ (Granville, 2004, p. 4), particularly in relation to an integrated framework as ‘an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. xi) serves as a backdrop to the investigation.

The significance of the study lies in its aims to clarify the conceptual muddle that is an integrated framework. It further hopes to separate rhetoric from the practical problems associated with the implementation of such a framework. Finally, it hopes add to the scholarly debate about the emerging education and training system in South Africa and thus contribute to an improved understanding of qualifications frameworks being developed and implemented throughout the world.

1.3 Research Questions

This inquiry therefore intends to answer the question *To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?*

Four supporting research questions unpack the main research question:

Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?

Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework?

Can the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?

Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?

The first supporting question investigated ‘policy symbolism’ and ‘the guiding philosophy for the SANQF’, which represent the strong social justice rationale for the development and implementation of an integrated national qualifications framework. The attempt of the new African National Congress (ANC) government to make a clean break from a past unjust and inequitable education and training system is reflected in the need for powerful symbols that signalled a new beginning. An integrated framework is thus seen to be the guiding philosophy of the emerging system that embodied the symbolism of the SANQF in systemic ways.

The second supporting research question explores the pragmatic approaches that will enable large-scale reform to take place, in keeping with the guiding philosophy of the framework. These approaches include the structure and the design of an integrated framework, as well as other measures, both within and outside of the framework that will enable the structure of the framework to come to life.

Research question three scrutinises these measures, including the development of communities of practice and trust, which evolve out of the need of sub-sectors to meet the needs and requirements of the sector.

Research question four seeks to investigate the persuasive logic emerging from a pragmatic need of sectors and institutions to embody the principles of the SANQF at the level of institutions and classrooms. This question deals, firstly, with the seemingly opposing epistemologies characteristic of education and of training, which ‘have co-existed uneasily within the common qualifications framework’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 6) and, secondly, with the emergence of curricula, which increasingly combine theory and

practice, to better reflect the needs of learners and workplaces in relation to developing solid theoretical groundings, complemented by practical application.

Combined, the four questions hope to reflect the different understandings of an integrated framework.

1.4 Characteristic of the Study

This inquiry took place against the background of a global trend of the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks as a means to regulate and improve the quality of the education and training system of the country implementing the framework.

However,

...while the development of qualifications frameworks is an international phenomenon, there is something unique about the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa. It is the scale and the ambition of the NQF rhetoric and its perceived centrality to the reconstruction of society in the political and social context of a post-apartheid regime that marks the [SANQF] out from other such initiatives around the world (Granville, 2004, p. 3).

Therefore, while the problems associated with the implementation of an integrated framework, in terms of ‘technical and professional concerns’ (Granville, 2004, p. 3), are not unique to South Africa, the central role of an integrated framework in social transformation, and the extent to which the education and training system stands proxy for the aspirations of a different and better society, are unique. The most important feature of the SANQF and its attempts in achieving integration is thus located in the drive to correct the social ills of apartheid, particularly in the emphasis on the value of learning and the social esteem of learners. This socio-political rationale for an integrated framework, on the one hand, has mobilised ‘hundreds of people from across fields and sectors, and from all parts of the population to build the NQF and give meaning to this “social construct”’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 90) but, on the other hand, has complicated the development of pragmatic approaches to integration owing to the ‘mad, irrational fury within the NQF project’ (Granville, 2004, p. 3) which seems to preclude criticism of the assumptions and objectives of an integrated framework. Whereas contestation and debate

are normal and necessary feature of an emerging system, the particular characteristic of the South African system is that an integrated framework purposed to undertake ‘a complete societal restructuring of how and where learning is recognised, structured and rewarded’ (Mehl, 2004, p. 23). An integrated framework in South Africa, therefore cannot be viewed without the acknowledging of the socio-political aims of the framework that are embodied in the five objectives of the SANQF, namely to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements; facilitate access, mobility and progression; enhance the quality of education and training; accelerate the redress of past injustices; and enable each learner to fully develop within a system that is available to all (SAQA, 2001).

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on qualifications frameworks. The literature review firstly places the SANQF within the international context of the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks and then traces the different interpretations of integration as reflected in other jurisdictions. A typology of qualifications frameworks, to the extent that this relates to integration, is introduced, and the historical development trajectory of the SANQF is presented. This chapter concludes with the contestations that have marked the implementation of an integrated national qualifications framework since its inception.

The conceptual framework for this inquiry is presented in Chapter 3. The different lenses or perspectives to be used for this study, are discussed. These lenses include policy symbolism; a guiding philosophy; the scope and architecture of the framework and qualifications; policy breadth; a continuum of learning; and curricular integrability.

Chapter 4 deals with the research design and methodology for the study. This inquiry undertook a further and deeper analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected for two concluded cycles of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Impact Study commissioned by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). In addition, the public responses to proposals for changes to the SANQF, published in *An Interdependent*

National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document (DoE & DoL, 2003) were analysed. Further data, collected to confirm and support the data collected for the two cycles of the NQF Impact study, was undertaken.

Chapter 5 is the first of the findings chapters. The results of the first supporting research question are presented in this chapter. These results reflect the extent to which the SANQF as an integrated framework is a symbol and the guiding philosophy for an education and training system attempting to make a clean break from a previous unjust and inequitable system.

The results of the second and third supporting research questions are presented in Chapter 6. The extent to which relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) are enabled through an integrated framework is discussed in the first part of the chapter, while the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, is discussed in the second part.

The final findings chapter, Chapter 7, presents the findings in relation to the fourth supporting research question. This chapter discusses a continuum of learning as a reflection of the different epistemologies characteristic of education and of training, and then moves on to investigate the ways in which curricula increasingly seem to take cognisance of the convergence of education and training and of theory and application.

Chapter 8 concludes the study. It provides a summary of the main findings, and discusses the main research question in relation to the ideal of an integrated framework. It also reflects on the methodology and the conceptual framework for the study and makes suggestions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The NQF, which came into being through the South African Qualifications Authority Act (1995), is a conceptual framework, setting the boundaries (principles and guidelines) within which the development and implementation of an education and training system are carried out. The primary objective of the NQF is to achieve an integrated approach to education and training in one national system, while opening up both access and possibilities for articulation and mobility within the system, through the portability of accumulated credits. In acknowledging that learning is not restricted to a single or limited learning sites, it allows for multiple pathways to the same learning ends...In addition, the NQF emphasises the importance of the recognition of all learning, including learning acquired through informal and non-formal means. This is of special importance given the intent to advance the redress of past discrimination and contribute to the personal development of each learner. But the NQF also wants to contribute to optimal development of society at large and therefore works towards enhancing the quality of education and training¹.

In this chapter, an 'integrated framework' is placed within the context of the international developments and implementation of national qualifications frameworks (2.1). In 2.2, in addition to the general introduction to the national qualifications framework movement, the converging purposes of qualifications frameworks internationally, are discussed. Section 2.3 introduces the key terms and possible differences in interpretation and uses of the notion of integration for an education and training system. In 2.4, the emerging typology of national qualifications frameworks, in particular in relation to integration, is presented. The history and context of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) in 2.5 attempts to show the particular trajectory of the emerging South African system, while 2.6 introduces the contestations that marked its establishment by discussing the review of the SANQF that has been conducted. This chapter concludes with a summary of the main issues identified through the literature review (2.7).

¹ SAQA, 2004, Annexure 2, p. 2

2.1 Introduction

This review analyses national and international literature dealing with national qualifications frameworks (NQFs), but focuses particularly on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) in relation to international trends regarding the integration of education and training. While it is evident that NQFs are becoming a global phenomenon, very little debate in either policy or research literature about national qualifications frameworks in general, and integrated frameworks specifically, is available. On the one hand, this may be owing to the fact that the NQF movement is a relatively new trend in education and training systems. On the other hand, NQFs in many countries are associated with one sector of the education and training system – most often the vocational sector. This seems to mean that, in the past, NQFs were not considered a topic for academic debate (Young, 2003). Further, in traditional systems, until the first NQFs, there was no attempt to bring together academic and vocational qualifications, school and university qualifications or the different types of professional and vocational qualifications within a single framework (Young, 2005) and thus, emerging systems do not have the benefit of experience from other systems. Nevertheless, in South Africa, the SANQF is seen to be the primary driver for education reform, and an integrated framework is seen to be an important lever to enable improved access and progression within the system. The purpose of the literature review is thus to place the SANQF within the context of the international trend towards the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks. Specifically, in terms of this inquiry, the emergence of ‘unified’ systems is investigated, as an integrated framework for South Africa is considered a key tenet for the reform of the disparate and unequal system of the past.

The concept of NQFs, in particular in terms of a coordinated education and training policy at national level, has spread to all continents and is gathering strength (Department of Education (DoE) & Department of Labour (DoL), 2002). Further, the national qualifications framework movement has attracted powerful endorsements from the world education and training community, for example, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These organisations all support the notion of integrated,

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

coordinated qualifications systems in one form or another, and there seems to be a convergence of aims across all countries implementing qualifications frameworks. One of the main aims seems to be the development of a national, accessible system where education and training provision is aligned to the skills and knowledge needed by 21st century societies. Other aims include the enhancement of the mobility of the workforce, which is seen to be enabled by an integrated or unified approach, particularly in regions where much workforce mobility is evident (for example, the European Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Pacific Islands Forum and the Caribbean Community) (DoE & DoL, 2002).

Against the background of the emergence of a knowledge-based global economy, national and international articulation between different systems of education and training, whereby portability of learning across these sub-systems is enhanced, seems to become more important. In addition, greater market influences, and the call for regular up-skilling and multi-skilling of individuals in relation to modern workplace requirements, seem to underlie the need for an increased convergence across education and training sectors and levels, including strengthening school-to-work programmes. Further, the dichotomy between education and training seems to have become blurred and this has led to a greater emphasis on quality assurance and accountability as the basis of trust amongst national and international partners, particularly between partner organisations that are offering ‘formal education’ and ‘workplace based training’. In some cases, for example, the South African system, the system also targets equity group participation in education and training (Faris, 1995). These global trends have a profound influence on the emerging structure of education and training systems. Systems are increasingly attempting to find ways in which education and training could become more complementary. The divide between these two main sub-systems no longer seems to hold in a modern society.

National qualifications frameworks are seen to have important benefits for national and international harmonisation of qualifications, and are now being developed and implemented across the globe. One such benefit includes the comparability of qualifications attained in the sub-sectors of the system. Systems are therefore increasingly attempting to align their education and training sectors, that is, to

integrate (or unify) these sectors. The literature identifies 1st generation, 2nd generation and 3rd generation NQFs. (Tuck, Keevy & Hart, 2004) (Figure 2.1).

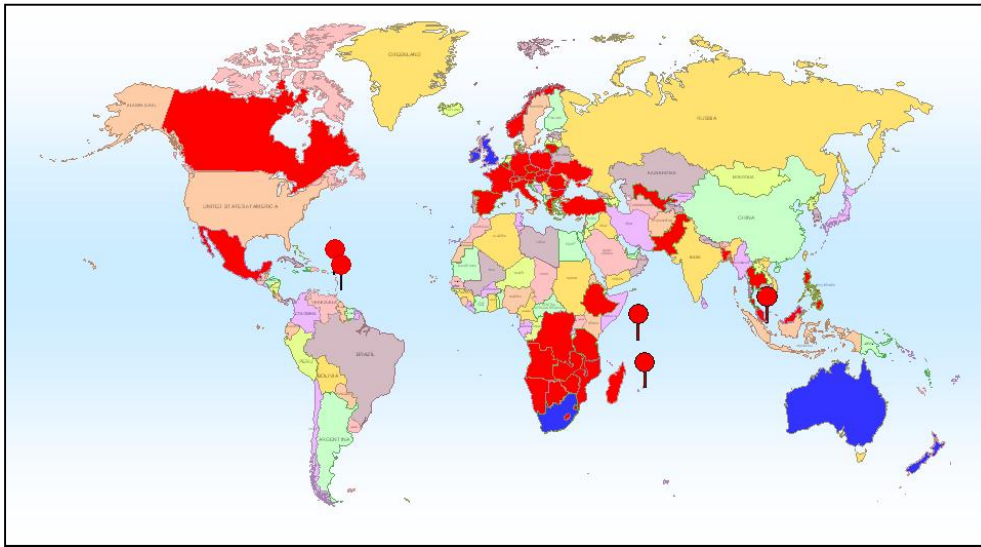


Figure 2.1. Distribution of NQFs

Key:

Blue – first generation NQFs

Red shading and red signposts – second and third generation NQFs

Table 2.1 presents a time-based categorisation of NQFs (Keevy, 2006, p. 2):

Table 2.1.

Time-based Categorisation of NQFs

1st Generation NQFs (Implemented since 1995)	2nd Generation NQFs (Implemented in the late 1990's, early 2000)	3rd Generation NQFs (Currently under consideration)
Australia, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa	Ireland, Mauritius, Malaysia, Mexico, Namibia, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago	Angola, Barbados, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Caribbean (regional), Democratic Republic of the Congo, EU (regional), France, Jamaica, Lesotho, Macedonia, Malawi, Mozambique, Pacific Islands (regional), Philippines, SADC (regional), Slovenia, Uzbekistan, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

While not all NQFs are unified or integrated frameworks, it is evident that in most cases there is a desire to achieve integration in parts, or all, of the education and training system. The extent to which a system is unified or integrated is linked to the purpose of the NQF. In addition to improving the understanding of the education and

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

training system and the progression possibilities within such a system, Tuck et al. (2004) cluster the main purposes as follows – (1) addressing issues of social justice; (2) improving access to the qualifications system; increasing and improving credit transfer between qualifications; and, improving the recognition of prior learning (RPL). To achieve these objectives, it seems important to (3) establish common learning standards to achieve greater comparability between sub-sectors of the system, and to enable intra-national or international benchmarking. Common standards defined and applied consistently in turn, are seen to be enhancing quality assurance, which supports the international recognition for national qualifications.

While some definitions of emerging qualifications frameworks are explicit in their descriptions of integration, in others the integration of education and training is implied through the extent to which the system is coherent and interrelated. The South African, the proposed SADC and the Lesotho frameworks respectively, for example, describe their frameworks as follows:

...[A] set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievements are registered to enable recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, and thereby using an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning (SAQA, 2001, p.1)

...[A] set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region, to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications by Member States, to harmonise qualifications wherever possible, and to create regional standards where appropriate (Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation, 2005, p. 7).

A NQF is a structure of defined and nationally accredited qualifications, which are awarded at defined levels. It indicates the interrelationships of the qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another. NQF, therefore, is the route through which the country brings education and training together in a single Unified System (Lesotho, 2004, p. 7).

Likewise, the emerging European Qualifications Framework (EQF), as an example of a regional (or meta-) framework, much like the proposed SADC framework, envisages the EQF ‘as a meta-framework that will enable qualifications frameworks at national and sectoral level to relate and communicate to each other’ (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 8). Other purposes of the EQF include ‘integrating vocational education and training (VET) and higher education more closely’ and ‘strengthening

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
the links between national and sectoral qualifications systems' (Scottish Executive, 2005, p. 8).

Young (2005, p. 1) maintains that the growing interest in national qualifications frameworks has less to do with educational reasons than with political reasons:

Examples of such reasons are (a) the scope they are seen to offer governments for making their national systems more accountable - England is a good example; (b) the importance for the governments of countries in transition of demonstrating that they have made a 'break with the past' [post apartheid South Africa is an obvious example]; (c) the hope that what appears to be a reform that is relatively straightforward (in the sense that establishing an NQF does not of itself require major institutional changes) and does not challenge local interests...

Nevertheless, all qualifications frameworks, according to Young (2005, p. 13), have as their common purpose to 'communicate':

All NQFs have a 'communication' role, in the sense that they provide a map of qualifications; they give some indication of progression routes between levels and, at least in principle, across sectors. The 'communication' potential of an NQF means that at a minimum it can assist both learners and those involved in career and training guidance in making choices.

In addition, there are compelling arguments for developing an integrated framework (Young, 2005, p. 32):

There are both administrative and political reasons for integrating all qualifications within a single framework. Administratively, a single integrated framework should be more coherent, easier to manage and ought to make all kinds of progression simpler. Politically, integration is tied to the idea of promoting *parity of esteem* between academic and vocational learning (emphasis in the original).

However, an integrated national framework is fraught with contestation and, in South Africa, particularly associated with the socio-political aspirations of a large part of the population who felt that they were unfairly excluded and discriminated against under the apartheid regime. This is evident from the vehement defence of an integrated approach from all sectors of education and training when it seemed that the two departments (Education and Labour), which politically are responsible for the implementation of the SANQF, intended to reverse the policy of an integrated framework (see Annexure 4), perhaps because it represents a powerful persuasive logic for a reforming system (Jansen, 2004, p. 92):

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

The NQF presents to South Africa what is arguably the most cogent and progressive set of ideas for transforming the education and training system. These core ideas have mobilised and inspired millions, and offered hope to those long excluded from this system.

South Africa in particular, and other countries in general, which have, or are in the process of implementing a national qualifications framework (NQF), seem to consider integration central to the idea of an NQF (Heyns & Needham, 2004).

2.2 The Centrality of Integration and the Convergence of Purpose

An integrated framework purports to enable effortless progression and seamless articulation of learners and learning between different components of an education and training system. Yet, particularly in South Africa, the notion of an integrated framework is one of the most hotly contested ideals of the emerging system. While existing literature hints at reasons for the contestation – ranging from political power struggles between the two departments responsible for the implementation of an NQF in South Africa (the Department of Education and Department of Labour), epistemological differences between education and training, and the linkages between theory and practice in curricula (Heyns & Needham, 2004) – few possible solutions are provided that will enable the system to take the ideal of an integrated system forward.

Moreover, research into the ways in which the integration of education and training is to be achieved is almost non-existent and is addressed to only a limited extent in a recent study in South Africa (NQF Impact Study, 2004 and 2005) and in Scotland ('Higher Still' initiative, 2000) (and then only on the periphery of these studies, as both investigated more than an integrated approach). From the literature it seems therefore that 'integration' as a concept has not been thoroughly problematised. In a review of the implementation of the South African NQF in 2002 (DoE and DoL), the research team (known as the 'Study Team'), for example, observed that the Departments 'have made no attempt to analyse in further detail [beyond the initial political statements] how the integrated approach to education and training should be operationalised, especially in areas where the departments do not see eye to eye' (p. 67).

This state of affairs may have important implications for the emerging system. It seems that unless attempts *are* made to operationalise integration, it is possible that the ideal of an integrated framework will remain in the realm of policy symbolism (refer to Chapter 5).

2.3 Terminology Used in Relation to Integration

Various terms have been used in relation to the concept of integration but, owing to greatly differing contexts, are not synonymous. These terms, depending on which system uses the concept, include ‘integration’, ‘unification’, ‘comprehensiveness’, ‘seamlessness’, ‘systemic coherence’, ‘all-encompassing’, ‘inter-dependence’, ‘inter-related’ and ‘coordinated’. However, a common thread that runs through all of the emerging education and training systems is that of the need to ‘unify’ academic and vocational learning in keeping with the converging purposes of qualifications offered in different sectors. In South Africa, this is commonly understood ‘in terms of linking or unifying *education* and *training*’, in ‘continental Europe the debate uses the terms *general* and *vocational*; in many English-speaking countries the former is subdivided into *academic* and *general* and [the] latter into *professional* and *vocational* (Raffe, 2005, p. 22).

Three pressures, according to Raffe (2005, p. 23), impact on the need for integration:

- I. Economic pressures: ‘the economic challenges of globalisation’ and ‘[c]hanges in work practices are perceived to require new types of skills and knowledge and new modes of learning which transcend the traditional distinctions between academic and vocational, for example by emphasising the integration of theory and practice’.
- II. Democratic pressures: these are ‘perceived to extend the egalitarian principles of comprehensive education’. Unified systems are therefore ‘seen as a way to include learners who are disaffected, disadvantaged or at risk of social or economic exclusion’. This pressure is particularly felt in South Africa’s new democracy.
- III. Systemic pressures: ‘the unification of academic and vocational learning is a response to the increased scale and complexity of education and training systems, to the wider range of economic and social purposes...and to systemic problems such as credentialism and academic drift’.

[University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P \(2007\)](#)

All of these pressures, but systemic pressures in particular, encourage the development of systems that will use common governance, regulation, funding and quality assurance, as well as attempt to enhance articulation between sub-systems to support learner progression and transfer of skills between different sub-sectors of the education and training system. Also common to all the systems are measures to enhance the status of vocational education and training relative to academic education to enable seamless articulation between such sub-systems (Raffe, 2005). This seems important because the SANQF came into being, in particular, to address issues of inequity of opportunity and the status of vocationally oriented qualifications. This stems from the recognition that any system that divides education and training ‘disvalues vocational programmes as inferior and second-rate’ (Young, 1996, p. 33) and is seen to be an important area for reform in countries where ‘social differences and inequalities are acute’ (Young, 1996, p. 33).

However, while much of the focus in South Africa on integration is the legacy of the profound inequalities of the apartheid education and training system, other countries hope to achieve the ‘unification’ of academic and vocational learning at a much more incremental pace than in South Africa – as an eventual outcome of the development of the system rather than the key tenet of the new system.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), for example, is a comprehensive, unified and ‘enabling or descriptive framework’ that aims to ‘encompass all qualifications delivered in Scotland’ (Raffe, 2003, p. 4) with ‘comparable’ (not equivalent) credit ratings at the different levels of the framework. The SCQF (2001, pp. 1–2), therefore, intends to make the relationships between qualifications clearer; clarify entry and exit points and routes for progression; maximise the opportunities for credit transfer; and, assist learners to plan their progress and learning.

Raffe (2003, p. 17) points out that ‘unification’ in Scotland encompasses three trends: ‘the integration of general and vocational curricula; the reduction or elimination of differences between educational tracks; and the development of “seamless” opportunities for access and progression in lifelong learning’, with Scotland focusing particularly on the last of the three.

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

The term 'integration' is most commonly used in South Africa and it refers at a political level to the integration of education and training, with the hope that it would result in changes in the relationship between these two main sub-systems (Raffe, 2005). The integration of education and training was to be particularly embodied in the integration of these two sectors in one ministry at a political level. However, rather than combine the two ministries, (Education and Labour), in post-apartheid South Africa they were kept separate as in the past. Why the decision was made to keep the system separate is unclear (French, 2005) and is seen by some commentators as one of the main reasons for the lack of integration (Jansen, 2004). However, in the initial conceptualisation of the SANQF, a much closer relationship was envisaged. In the African National Congress (ANC) *Policy Framework for Education and Training of the Reconstruction and Development Programme: A policy framework*, 'integration' was explained as follows:

By establishing a national qualifications framework which *integrates all elements* of the education and training system, we must enable learners to progress to higher levels from any starting point. They must be able to obtain recognition and credits for qualifications and toward qualifications *from one part of the system to another*. The system must enable assessment and recognition of prior learning and skills acquired through experience. To this end curricula should *cut across traditional divisions of skill and knowledge* (emphases added) (ANC, 1994, p. 62).

However, from the outset 'integration', as defined above, led to contestation and the term 'an integrated approach' to education and training seemed more palatable to critics. On the face of it there is not much difference between the two, that is 'integration' and 'an integrated approach', but Isaacs and Nkomo (2003, p. 80) noted that it is more than a nuance change: 'For some, [an integrated approach] is actually an integrated system. For others, it is two systems running side by side and if you occasionally look over the fence dividing the two, that's the integrated approach'. It appears, in the latter interpretation of an integrated approach, that it means the existence of two or more learning tracks, for example, a discipline-based track, a vocationally oriented track and an occupationally based track in education and training with links between them. The notion of three tracks became evident chiefly in a consultation document produced by an inter-departmental task team (of Education and Labour), namely *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System*:

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

Consultative Document (DoE & DoL, 2003), which is one of the reviews² of the SANQF that may have a profound impact on the way integration is operationalised in South Africa (more about this in section 2.6).

‘Unification’ is a term most commonly used in Scotland. Unification means the linking or unifying of academic and vocational learning, or discipline-based and work-based (or practice-based) learning. In a study commissioned by the Scottish Executive (2005, p. 11), it was noted that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) aims to ‘bring together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework’:

[The SCQF] utilises two concepts: amount or volume of learning outcomes, and level of outcomes of learning. The concepts of volume and level can be used together to describe all appropriately assessed learning, wherever or however achieved; *they can also clarify the relationships and links between different qualifications and programmes of learning* (emphasis added).

In addition, a ‘comprehensive qualifications framework’ is a term recently introduced in the South African debate on integration. In a number of informal proposals emerging from the Department of Education the term ‘comprehensive’ seem to be replacing or superseding the term ‘integration’ (Blom, 2006). ‘Comprehensive’ in these proposals means that while other national qualifications frameworks typically separate their industry (vocational and workplace-based) and academic sectors (schools and higher education), the SANQF is a ‘comprehensive’ framework including all types and levels of qualifications. Thus, unlike many systems, which have ‘partial frameworks’ (Raffe, 2005), perhaps including only one or two of the sub-sectors of the system, for example, vocational and industry-based learning, the South African system has included all sectors and sub-sectors. However, according to Raffe (2005, p. 21), ‘comprehensiveness’ is not synonymous with ‘integration’:

² Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (DoE & DoL, 2002)

An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document (DoE & DoL, 2003)

A third review, undertaken by the European Union, as the main funder of the SANQF in its formative years, was technical in nature in relation to the work of the South African Qualifications Authority, and will not be discussed.

The fourth publication, *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for discussion* (Ministry of Education, 2004) is not strictly a review, but proposes to implement changes recommended in the other publications, with implications for an integrated framework.

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

An integrated qualifications framework is more than just a comprehensive one. A comprehensive framework, as distinct from a partial framework, includes all types of learning: academic and vocational, formal and informal, education and training. Being comprehensive is a necessary condition of an integrated framework, but is not a sufficient condition.

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

Table 2.2 is an analysis of the different interpretations of integration as espoused in a number of emerging education and training systems:

Table 2.2.

Different Interpretations of an Integrated Framework

Name of country	Interpretation of integration/unification	Scope of integration/unification
Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How qualifications relate to each other ○ Comparable (not equivalent) learning, but with parity of esteem ○ Portability of learning and credit transfer ○ Meaningful progression between different components of the system ○ Articulation of units of learning between vocationally oriented and academic programmes 	<p>Post 16 school- and college-based provision Academic and vocational subjects Links with higher education (Raffe, 2003)</p>
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing equivalencies ○ Develop routes of credit transfer ○ Paths of progression between different components of the system ○ Parity of esteem between different components of the system 	<p>Vocational education and training Further and higher education and training sectors, other than universities (Granville, 2003)</p>
New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Registered qualifications with common components ○ Relationship between qualifications ○ Credit transfer ○ Learning pathways ○ Reduce artificial distinctions between academic and vocational knowledge and qualifications 	<p>Academic and vocational provision Strong school-industry links Excludes universities, but degrees are on the register of qualifications (Philips, 2003)</p>
Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pathways linkages; seamless pathways ○ Improved coherence and articulation within vocational education and training (VET) ○ Horizontal articulation between VET certificates and degrees ○ Credit transfer between schools and VET in upper secondary education ○ Dual awards ○ Cross-sectoral articulation and alignment with VET qualifications 	<p>Vocational education and training, including technical colleges, schools and institutes, but excluding higher education and autonomous school sector Some credit transfer between post-school VET and higher education (Keating, 2003)</p>

Table 2.2 (Continued).

Different Interpretations of an Integrated Framework

Name of country	Interpretation of integration/unification	Scope of integration/unification
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equity and social justice ○ Opening up access to education and training ○ Rejection of divisions between academic and applied, theory and practice, knowledge and skills and head and hand ○ Rejection of old occupational and social class distinctions ○ Standardisation, equivalence and portability of qualifications ○ Promoting coherence and better articulation ○ Credit accumulation and transfer ○ Parity of esteem 	Schooling, higher education (including public universities) and industrial and vocational education and training (Ensor, 2003)

The commonalities across these systems seem to be:

- Meaningful *progression* between different components of the system
- *Articulation* possibilities between different components of the system (particularly between vocational and academic streams)
- *Parity of esteem* of qualifications attained in different sectors of the system

However, as noted above, ‘the spread of NQFs cannot be seen separately from the increasingly central role that many national governments are giving to qualifications themselves as measures of educational productivity’ (Young, 2005, p. 3). As noted earlier, there is limited literature about NQFs as an education phenomenon. The descriptions and purposes of the qualifications frameworks thus seem, at present, to be primarily an espoused policy, rather than practice. The typology of these frameworks unpacks the meaning of integration to a much greater extent.

2.4 Typology of National Qualifications Frameworks

Young (2005, p. 10) says that qualifications frameworks seem to share a set of common elements. Qualifications are described in terms of (1) a *single set of criteria* or a single definition of what is to count as a qualification. A *single hierarchy* (2) expressed as a single set of levels is used, each with distinct level descriptors which describe the depth and breadth of learning at that particular level. Qualifications are (3) *classified* (in the case of vocational qualifications) in terms of a comprehensive set of occupational fields. Further, qualifications are described in terms of (4) *learning*

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

outcomes that are independent of the site, the form of provision and the type of pedagogy and curriculum through which they may be achieved. The framework of qualifications provides a set of (5) *benchmarks* against which any learning can be assessed in terms of its potential contribution to a qualification and finally, all qualifications are defined in terms of elements (sometimes referred to as units or unit standards) and ascribed a volume in terms of notional learning hours expressed as quantifiable credit (6). A learner has to achieve a given number of credits to gain a qualification.

The first four points above relate chiefly to integration. Where qualifications follow a corresponding structure, it would, in theory, be easier to transfer credits from one qualification to another. A single set of level descriptors describes the depth and breadth of learning at a particular level and, again, would facilitate recognition of learning across contexts. ‘Families’ of qualifications would have a high degree of shared purpose and thus could enhance articulation; and independent learning outcomes (that is, independent of the institution offering the qualification) would enhance parity of esteem between sectors and institutions.

Raffe (2003) takes this further and maintains that qualifications frameworks can be understood in terms of five broad characteristics: the *purpose* of the NQF; the *scope* of the NQF; the level of *prescriptiveness*; the rate at which an NQF is implemented, or the *incrementalism* of the implementation; and the *policy breadth* of the reforms. Briefly, *purpose*, *scope* and *level of prescription* relate to the debates about integration, while *incrementalism* and *policy breadth* are associated with the leadership and governance in relation to the implementation of an NQF (SAQA, 2005), in particular in terms of the operationalisation of a concept, such as integration, in practice.

Further developments of the typology were undertaken by Keevy (2005, p. 125), and three more characteristics of NQFs were added: the *guiding philosophy* of an NQF, its *architecture* and its *governance*. These are included as the *guiding philosophy* and *governance*, in particular, are relevant to this study. In short, the typology of national qualifications frameworks is summarised in Table 2.3 (from Keevy, 2005, pp. 40–42).

Table 2.3.

The Typology of National Qualifications Frameworks

Characteristic	Description
Guiding philosophy	The underlying thinking that implicitly, often covertly, underlies the development and implementation of an NQF
Purpose	The explicit, usually overt, reasons for the development and implementation of the NQF – purpose is usually reflected in the objectives of the NQF
Scope	The measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF
Prescriptiveness	The stringency of the criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included on the NQF
Incrementalism	The rate and manner in which the NQF is implemented
Architecture	The configuration of structural elements that make up the design of an NQF
Governance	All the activities that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage institutions, sectors or processes associated with the NQF

The *guiding philosophy* of an NQF is the ‘underlying thinking that implicitly, often covertly, underlies the development and implementation of the NQF’ (Keevy, 2005, p. 125). The guiding philosophy of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) seems to have been influenced by the work of Paolo Freire (1999 and 2000), but also by Mezirow’s (2000) constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning (Blom and Keevy, 2005) and the egalitarian ideology implicit in these works. Others, such as Allais (2003), say that the establishment of the SANQF was influenced by neo-liberal economic policies, which is a far cry from the egalitarian purposes espoused by Freire. It seems that in the conceptualisation of the SANQF, these aspects were not considered to be mutually exclusive. However, according to Allais (2003), in the current context, neo-liberal policies and the increasing marketisation of education and training are overtaking the original socio-political purpose of the NQF.

Nevertheless, the *purpose* of an NQF is directly linked to the guiding philosophy of the system and the guiding philosophy of the SANQF still seems to be rooted in the

sociopolitical impetus of a post-apartheid society, namely to remove the impermeable barriers to quality education and training and the social value given to such qualifications. The purpose is ‘the explicit, usually overt, reasons for the development and implementation of the NQF’ (Keevy, 2005, p. 125). What qualifications frameworks are intended to achieve is clearly tied to the political and cultural context of the country developing the framework. As noted earlier, reasons for the development of a national qualifications framework include addressing issues of social justice, improving access and progression and establishing standards to enhance comparability (Granville, 2003). Granville (2003) points out that South Africa is the main (or perhaps sole), example of a framework primarily intended to contribute to a national programme of social reconstruction.

The purpose of an NQF in turn, influences the other characteristics of the system.

The third characteristic of an NQF that has a bearing on integration is *scope*. Scope is defined as ‘the measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF’ (Keevy, 2005, p. 125). Scope includes at least two dimensions (Keevy, 2005, p. 148):

The *first dimension* refers to the integration of levels (e.g. inclusion of university qualifications); sectors (e.g. occupational sector and geographical region); and types (e.g. academic, vocational, private, public)...[t]his dimension of scope can be seen as a continuum ranging from *partial* to *comprehensive* (Raffe, 2005).

The *second dimension* of scope is the relationships between the categories or systems...[i]n some cases these relationships are explicitly defined, even prescribed, whilst in others they are left for roleplayers to negotiate.

Howieson and Raffe (1999, p. 2) give a useful classification of *scope*, namely a ‘tracked’, ‘linked’ or ‘unified’ system:

In a “tracked system” each of the separate components of the education and training system has distinctive purposes and a different ethos [is] associated with each track; in a “linked system”, there are common elements across tracks and the purposes and ethos overlap; a “unified system” displays multiple purposes, has a pluralistic ethos and integrates academic and vocational learning (SAQA, 2005, p. 32).

In Table 2.4, the first dimension of scope in relation to a ‘tracked, linked or unified’ system is portrayed.

Table 2.4.

Scope of a National Qualifications Framework

Tracked system	Linked system	Unified/integrated system
Vocational and general education are organised in separate and distinctive tracks.	Different tracks exist with emphasis on similarities and equivalence Common structures to qualifications Credit transfer between tracks	No tracks Single system

In terms of this perspective on integration, qualifications frameworks can thus be placed on a continuum from ‘tracked’ to ‘unified’. However, according to Tuck, Hart and Keevy (2004), it is doubtful if a completely tracked system can be considered to be an NQF (refer to Chapter 6).

Closely associated with the ‘tracked, linked, unified’ continuum, is the notion of ‘loose’ or ‘tight’ frameworks, referring to the level of prescription for qualifications to be included on the framework, the quality assurance measures to be used, and the key system features (SAQA, 2005).

In Table 2.5, these additional features are shown (SAQA, 2005, p. 32):

Table 2.5.

Loose and Tight Frameworks

Tight	Loose
Prescriptive about qualification design and quality assurance	Based on general principles
Regulatory purpose	Seek to communicate
Aim to achieve wider social goals	Regulate to some extent
Tend to apply common rules and procedures across all sectors	Accept differences between sectors

It seems evident that a ‘tight’ framework will facilitate an integrated approach much more than a ‘loose’ framework. This may hint at the strong initial support for an integrated approach in South Africa: tighter, regulatory specifications are in keeping with the ‘duty of government’ to steer the direction of the emerging system (Jonathan, 2001, p. 77).

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

Figure 2.2 portrays some qualifications frameworks discussed in this literature review in relation to the scope and prescriptiveness continuum (from SAQA, 2005, p. 33). Some frameworks seem to be *loosely linked*, while others are *loosely unified*. The South African framework is currently considered *tightly unified*, meaning that it has a regulatory purpose, it uses a single description for qualifications to be included on the framework and it tends to use common rules and procedures across all sectors.

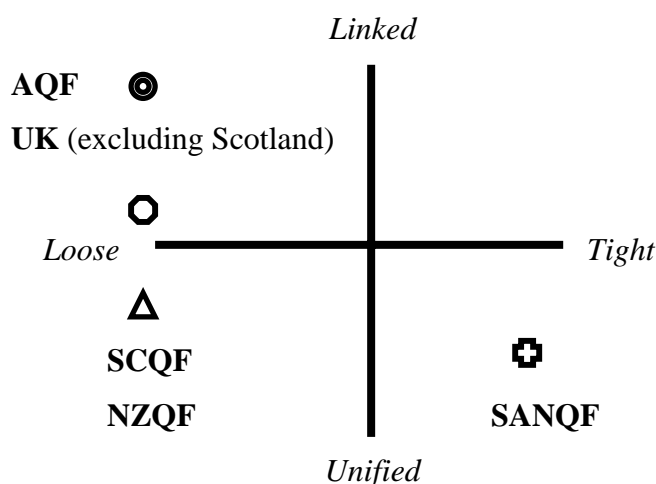


Figure 2.2. Scope and Prescriptiveness of National Qualifications Frameworks

- Key:**
- AUF - Australian Qualifications Framework
 - UK - United Kingdom (excluding Scotland)
 - SCQF - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
 - △ NZQF - New Zealand Qualifications Framework
 - ⊕ SANQF - South African National Qualifications Framework

The best examples of the ‘first generation NQFs’ (that is Scotland, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) in terms of these characteristics are:

- Linked: Australia and the UK (excluding Scotland)
- Unified: South Africa

A hybrid of a unified and linked system has emerged in New Zealand and Scotland. Scotland’s school and college-based vocational education and training are unified, but the relationship with higher education and work-based training is more loosely linked,

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

while New Zealand's vocational education and training is unified, but schools and universities are loosely linked with the rest of the system.

Most countries favoured a tracked system before NQFs came into being ... 'because school education, university education, vocational education and vocational training were seen as distinct and largely unrelated' (ILO, 2006, p.14). However, internationally this view seems to be challenged and, certainly in South Africa, 'the question of the need for greater articulation or mobility between academic and vocational education and training sectors has been on the South African educational agenda since the early 1980s' (Kraak, 2004, p. 53).

Qualifications frameworks therefore vary in their focus and aims, but all, to a lesser or greater extent, seem to attempt to improve progression of learners within the system and to ensure comparable quality, depth and breadth of learning in order to enable the recognition of learning regardless of where (and how) the learning has been achieved – these are, in my view, different dimensions of integration.

2.5 The History of the South African National Qualifications Framework

The history of the SANQF is a short one. The South African Qualifications Authority Act was promulgated in 1995, and the organisation came into being in 1997 with the appointment of an Executive Officer. However, the idea of national qualifications frameworks is rooted in two reform impulses in Scotland and the United Kingdom (Young, 2003). The Scottish 16+ Action Plan, launched in 1984, and the National Vocational Framework (NVQ), launched in 1986 in England, formed the basis for a succession of reforms culminating in the concept of a qualifications framework. These initiatives led to similar movements in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, where in some cases, the developments were limited to vocational education and training (DoE & DoL, 2002).

Not all of these countries have chosen to, or are planning to develop an all-encompassing education and training system similar to the South African system (see Figure 2.2). Where this has been attempted, for example in New Zealand, there has been a retreat from the original plan for a comprehensive system, where all sectors and levels of education and training are included, to a compromise position of

allowing higher education and general schooling to function as separate entities, but with higher education qualifications registered on the framework (Philips, 2003). Other countries have developed qualifications frameworks only for vocational education and training (for example, Australia) (Keating, 2003) or for higher education.

Thus, while ‘it is common knowledge that the South African National Qualifications Framework originated from the strong need of the post-1994 African National Congress (ANC) government to reform a disparate and unequal education and training system’ (SAQA, 2005, p. 23), the reform impulse started much earlier – in the aftermath of the 1976 school riots in Soweto, south of Johannesburg. McGrath (1997, p. 7) notes:

At the centre of the emergent formulations is the notion of an integration of education and training into a single National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This notion appeared in the South African policy debates at the beginning of the 1990s largely through elements of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Their work itself drew on similar thinking in the other countries of the old Commonwealth, notably Australia and England. Such a vision was also partly developed in a response to the continued policy direction of the former state from the De Lange Report to the Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa (CUMSA) and the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS).

The fact that organised labour played such an important role in the development of the idea of an NQF is significant and hints at some of the contestations about integration. The De Lange Report and subsequent work undertaken to investigate how education and training could alleviate the economic difficulties in the 1980s were overlaid with ‘the rise in political opposition to the apartheid regime from both worker and student movements across the country’ (Kraak, 2004, p. 46). As a ‘site of the struggle’ education and training under a new dispensation were meant to overcome the ‘lack of co-ordination’ and a ‘fragmented and divisive’ qualifications structure (Kraak, 2004, p. 47).

Therefore, in the early discussions of education and training in post-apartheid South Africa, the new system was meant to address a multitude of problems in education provision. First, ‘[e]ducation was for a long time a major source of discontent in apartheid South Africa, and was often a rallying point in the broader struggle against

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
it' (Allais, 2003, p. 307). The SANQF 'was [thus] set up to redress the effects of a hated order, and to promote new paths to recognition and access' (French, 2005, p. 54). Education and training in South Africa became emotionally charged with the passion to transform a disparate system to a system that would 'be an instrument for human dignity and human rights' (French, 2005, p. 54).

Thus, the idea of a comprehensive and integrated NQF was born. In October 1995, the proceedings of a workshop on the proposed NQF were published by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), where the passion of the thinkers in education and training was reflected as follows (HSRC, 1995, pp. 5–6):

First and foremost, we need to create an *equitable system* of education and training which serves *all* South Africans well. Such a system will need to accommodate those people who are in conventional schools, colleges and training programmes. It will also need to find ways to include the learning needs of the many South Africans who have not enjoyed formal education and training [referring to the recognition of prior learning (RPL)] (emphasis added).

Later, at a conference hosted by the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) in April 1996 (IMWG, p. 2), the point was made that the underlying concept of the new education and training system is *an integrated approach*.

The introduction and acceptance of this concept [namely an integrated approach] was a breakthrough in the development of thinking on the National Qualifications Framework. It is progressive and developmental, not prescriptive and dogmatic.

Integration was thus vested with the responsibility to address at least four problems: the racially-based fragmentation of the education and training system and the lack of opportunities to access education and training; the low status of vocational education and training; the lack of articulation between sectors; and parity of esteem between academic and vocational studies (Kraak, 2004).

It is evident that there would be no question of an incremental approach to the implementation of the SANQF, which through the gradual development of trust relationships, and communities of practice, could enhance the establishment of an integrated framework (refer to Chapter 6). French (2005), notes that there was no trust, and that the previous system was completely discredited. Thus, the new system

had to deal with these problems in a ‘revolutionary’ manner (Young, 2005), unlike Scotland, where the Scottish NQF has developed over a period of 20 years (Tuck et al., 2004). There was an urgent need to make a decisive break from the apartheid past. The SANQF became the symbol of such a break. The South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act 58 of 1995) came to symbolise ‘the move from the old to the new: from a patchwork of systems, [characterised] by division, inequality, segmentation, centralisation and poor accessibility, to a coherent and integrated national system characterised by openness, articulation, devolution, high participation, creativity and built-in quality assurance’ (IMWG, 1996, p. 2).

However, perhaps because of the strong involvement of organised labour, the academic, high-status sector faced two constraints. On the one hand, if the arguments against an integrated approach came across as too strong, they would be labelled as ‘stone-age resisters [or be attributed] with racial or ideological motives’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 90). On the other hand, not too much could be made of the seemingly increasing vocationalisation of education, because vocationalism has a powerful logic for those who have been excluded on an economic and political front. French (2005, p. 56) notes:

If [the Department of Education and Training and the Committee of University Principals] had done so, it was unlikely that their voices would have been respected. Indeed, it became a strong point in the advocacy for the NQF to emphasise the rationally designed “national standards” were to become the arbiters of all recognition of learning, not institutions. The influence of the universities on the curriculum on aspirations and choices, was seen as unfortunate given the development needs of the country and the learning needed by people with no prospect of going into higher education or training.

Thus, ‘the development and implementation of the NQF has been favoured by *political impetus*, and hampered by *political contestation*’ (SAQA, 2004, Annexure 2, p. 10) and an integrated framework, nine years after the establishment of the South African Qualifications Authority, still seems to be at the level of espoused policy, rather than practice. This is despite the acknowledgement that in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, education and training have been separated, both by the way they are organised and by the way society thinks about them (HSRC, 1995) and that only through a dedicated strategy which is not vested with political symbolism, but

that approaches the problem from a systemic point of view, an integrated framework could become a reality.

Furthermore, in spite of policy adaptation by, for example, higher education and the schooling system, ‘the original political and moral passions continue to inspire, vex, limit and shape debates and decisions within the NQF’ (French, 2005, p. 58). This seems to be an important reason for the fact that the reviews of the SANQF, which were initiated in 2001 by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal and the Minister of Labour, Membathisi Mdladlana, have, five years later, not yet been concluded.

2.6 The Reviews of the South African National Qualifications Framework

The SANQF has been the subject of debate and contestation from the outset, partly perhaps as a result of the lack of trust that existed at its inception: ‘[T]he NQF was created in a context in which there was no trust between the proponents of the new order and the providers of the old order’ (French, 2005, p. 55). Contestations thus emerged from key stakeholder groupings: the state (old and new), employers, organised labour and education and training institutions. The HSRC (1995, pp. 33–34) notes that these roleplayers were ‘locked into battle over many issues’, including the issue of an integrated framework, and summarises the contestations as follows:

- **State concerns:** here state includes the old Departments of Education and Manpower and the new or “shadow” state. According to the HSRC (1995), issues in the former (pre-1994) state centred around the Departments of Education and Manpower resisting integration, having come from a history where “they literally never spoke to each other”. The shadow state, on the other hand, represented the view that any new education and training strategy should address the concerns of economic reconstruction and growth, should lead to active labour market policies and should address past injustice.
- **Employers** were concerned about economic growth and global competitiveness, and viewed education and training as a means to improve productivity through worker training.
- **Labour’s** concerns revolved around the need for employment security and employment growth, as well as the need for progression or career paths and a strongly articulated need for [Adult Basic Education and Training].
- **Providers** were concerned about a fragmented system of learning that prevented continuous learning pathways (SAQA, 2004, Annexure 2, p. 11).

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

Interestingly, the original proposal for a new system of education and training system in South Africa was that of an ‘articulated system’ and not an ‘integrated system’ (French, 2005, p. 54):

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

The main reason for the decision to establish an integrated framework, rather than an articulated system, was the belief that ‘segregated institutions and processes of education provision...were for the most part centres of privilege and exclusion, were backward and corrupt, and were scarcely worthy of notice’ (French, 2005, p. 55). Again, it is evident that an incremental approach, where ‘some provisions of the old order that were motivated by hard-won experience and legitimate considerations could be used to build a new system, was not possible and in fact was regarded ‘as being inappropriate to “the political moment”’ (French, 2005, p. 56).

However, despite being silenced, the contestations about an integrated framework have been, and still are with the SANQF (HSRC, 1995, p. 34):

It is important to grasp differences of opinion that lie behind arguments for an “integrated approach” for when temporary consensus is reached in any negotiation process, it does not mean that differences miraculously disappear. Some stakeholders decide to “sit on the fence” for a while; some continue to push for interpretations and meanings that are congruent with their needs and interest; other withdraw and move to negotiation forums which better serve their interests.

With this as the background, it was possibly inevitable that the new system would, a few years after implementation, be reviewed. Mehl, (2004, p. 21) makes the point that:

New concepts and new entities cannot be introduced into complex adaptive systems such as education and training structures without the system realigning its components, regrouping existing structures and protecting transitional and existing interests. It is often thought that

[University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P \(2007\)](#)
changes introduced into a system will be seamlessly incorporated for the greater good, particularly if, as was the case with the NQF in 1995, they enjoy national and ideological acclaim.

Jansen (2004, p. 50), however, notes that the review of the SANQF was more than ‘part of the normal cycle of administrative review associated with government bureaucracies throughout the world’

Reviews also represent...a political intervention intended to revisit, revise or even reverse policies around which the political agenda has shifted. Such reviews are often conducted in response to political pressures from above or below (or both) to deal with an unsatisfactory situation. Reviews are often facilitated by a change in political leadership, e.g. a new Minister of Education. It would be a mistake, therefore, to read the review of the National Qualifications Framework as simply a logical event following time-honoured procedures of reviewing, refining and affirming policy. Inevitably, therefore, such reviews generate intense political turmoil, within and outside government bureaucracies.

Four years after the publication of the first report dealing with the review of the SANQF, while there is still no clarity as to the direction the system will take, the implications of the reviews for an integrated framework are substantial.

The first review, entitled *Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework* (DoE & DoL, 2002), starts to conceptualise integration as ‘a continuum of learning’ (refer to Chapter 7). The response in 2003 of the two sponsoring departments (Education and Labour) to this review, in the form of the publication *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003), agrees with the notion of a continuum of learning, but in its operationalisation thereof, dis-integrates the system into three tracks. The third publication, *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for discussion* (Ministry of Education, 2004), makes no attempt to address integration except in the loosest of forms. The shifting understandings of integration emerging from these three documents are shown in Table 2.6 (derived from SAQA, 2005, p. 35):

Table 2. 6.

Shifting Understandings of Integration

Current conceptual model	Study team report (DoE & DoL, 2002)	Consultative Document (DoE & DoL, 2003)	Draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (Ministry of Education, 2004)
An integrated framework	A linked framework, with education and training viewed as opposite points of a 'continuum of learning'	A tracked framework, with links between the tracks through articulation 'spaces'	Tracks, not necessarily linked and with an emphasis in the differences in purpose, content, outcomes or equivalence, but with similarity in terms of levels

The conceptual shifts could have a profound effect on the implementation of integration as a principle. The Study team report (2002, p. iii) explains integration as follows:

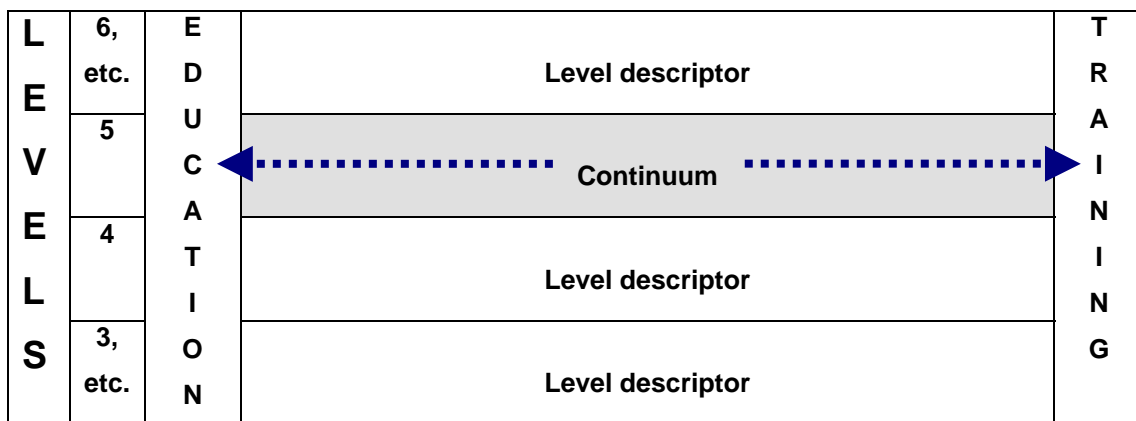
The idea that a qualifications framework is integrated means that it is a single framework that includes all qualifications, and that academic and vocational qualifications represent a continuum of education and training, not a division between them.

While the subsequent response by the Departments in the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) seems to agree with the notion of 'a continuum of learning', and notes that education and training 'are not in fact opposites but equally essential facets of the same national learning system', its interpretation of this continuum is 'an articulated system' (French, 2005, p. 12), namely: '...a National Qualifications Framework with three inter-related but distinguished learning modes or typical pathways: discipline-based, career-focused/general vocational and occupational context-based'. The further development of the SANQF should thus be approached 'in such a manner that respects the different modes of learning and encourages collaboration and inter-dependence among the various structures, without compromising the unique value each learning perspective brings to the whole' (French, 2005, p. 7). The solution offered in the *Consultative Document* to 'respect the different modes of learning' is to develop unique level descriptors for each mode, with articulation routes between them (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 13):

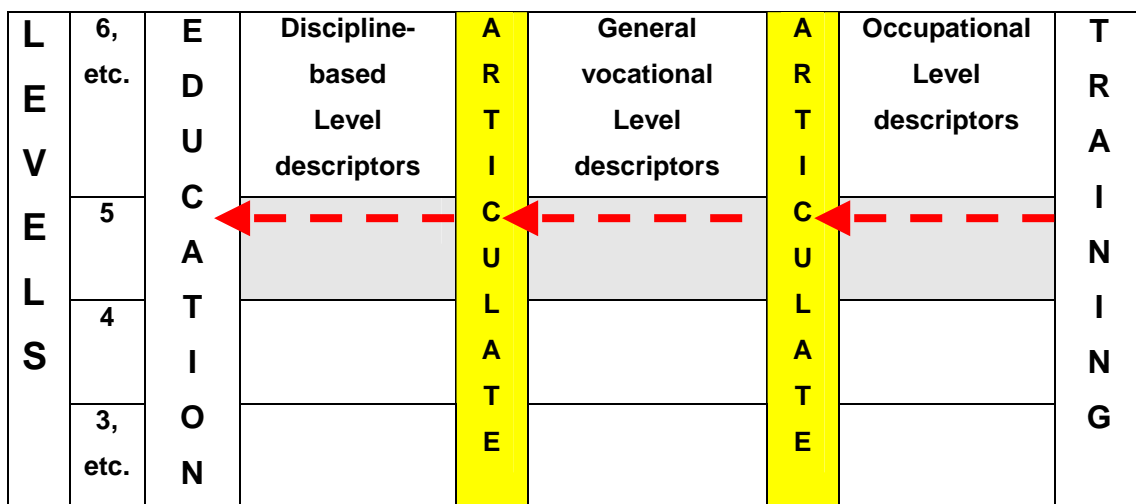
Instead of attempting to bridge the conceptual divide with level descriptor statements of broader and broader generality, it may well be necessary to consider fit for purpose level descriptors for each learning mode that are

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
 nevertheless sufficiently compatible with one another, level by level, that they assist the articulation of qualifications within and between pathways.

The draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) (Ministry of Education, 2004), takes this further by considering the proposed framework for higher education as a separate framework for qualifications all together, and which provide the basis for ‘integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework’ (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 1). Diagrammatically, these conceptual shifts are represented in Figure 2.3:

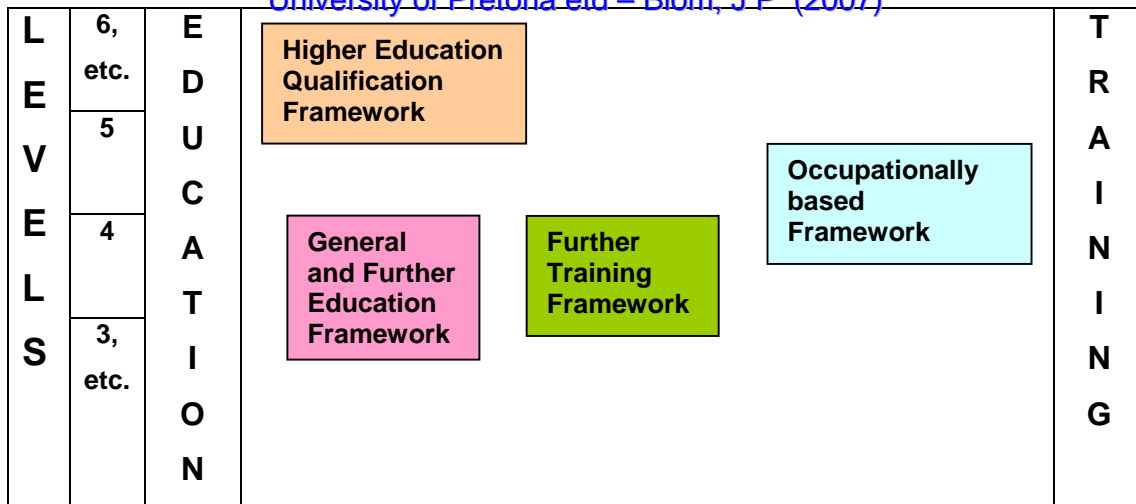


The Study Team report (2002)



The Consultative Document (2003)

Figure 2.3. Diagrammatic Representation of the Shifts in the Conceptual Understanding of Integration



The draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2004)

Figure 2.3 (Continued). Diagrammatic Representation of the Shifts in the Conceptual Understanding of Integration

However, while finalisation of the review initiated in 2001 is still awaited, the idea of an integrated framework still seems to be considered a key tenet of the system, albeit in terms of different interpretation of integration – at least as an espoused principle.

With so much hinging on an education and training system, it is perhaps not surprising that the two sponsoring departments in their response to the 2002 review are so careful to affirm the original intent of the SANQF and are sensitive to the strong support for an integrated framework of education and training. In their introduction to the response to the review of 2002 (DoE & DoL, 2003, p.1) they noted: ‘Despite the difficulties of implementing changes of such magnitude the idea of an integrated framework of quality assured qualifications is a reference point for all new developments in our national learning system’.

The SANQF therefore, and then in particular, an integrated national framework of education and training, has rightly or wrongly, become vested with a national programme of ‘social transformation’ (Granville, 2004, p. 3). The power of emotion behind the new philosophy for education and training in South Africa is so strong that it seems to be ‘insulated from serious critique’ (Allais, 2003, p.321), and the political heads of the system currently seem to want to avoid, rather than confront the very real issues of the implementation of an integrated framework. Jansen, (2004, p. 59) maintains that the ‘recommendations in both reports could arguably be read as a

review of policy and not simply a statement of improved implementation’ and yet no substantial changes have been effected (SAQA, 2005, p. 27):

Differences continue to hold sway between those who maintain the ideal of a fully integrated system, those who believe that there are significant differences between modes of learning that make even the loosest form of integration a remote possibility, and those who recognise these differences but argue that they represent points on a continuum.

2.7 Conclusion

From the literature it is evident that the development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks, as an attempt to achieve greater coherence in national education and training systems, is a global phenomenon. This seems to stem from the recognition that education and training systems, in the past, had limited progression routes within the system, and that the mobility of learners and/or workers was constrained as a result of poor links between education, training and the workplace.

Further, increasing globalisation and the emergence of regional conventions, such as the Bologna (Europe) and Arusha (Africa) conventions, clearly influence the need for common benchmarks and comparability between countries in a particular region – hence the proposed European Qualifications Framework, the SADC framework, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Caribbean Community, to name a few.

In individual states, systemic pressures, most notably the increased complexity of education and training and the relationships of the system with the world of work, and the increasing diffusion of formal (in institutions) and non-formal education and training (in workplaces) seems to need the development of a closer relationship between these different components of the system.

In addition, the traditional divide between the status and value of ‘educational qualifications’ and ‘training’ is increasingly challenged. The vocational component of the system is seeking to achieve parity of esteem with the academic component of the system and is looking for improved ways in which the learning achieved in the vocational component could articulate meaningfully with the academic component.

Linked to the higher status of vocational learning is the belief that education, in its traditional form, is no longer relevant to the needs of the workplace and that, in order to attain greater economic growth and global competitiveness, education and training should be market-related and should include not only appropriate theory, but also workplace practice.

It is therefore not surprising that integration, in one form or another, is actively encouraged by states – either as a comprehensive or partial framework. Such are the perceived systemic pressures on many countries developing and implementing national qualifications frameworks.

However, while South Africa is subject to the same systemic and global pressures, the history of education and training in this country has vested the emerging system with the sociopolitical aspirations of a large number of individuals who were denied opportunities for learning under the apartheid regime. The NQF policy in South Africa is thus also given the responsibility to redress lack of opportunity for the disenfranchised. Integration in South Africa, therefore, cannot be seen separately from the context within which it is being implemented, and this is probably partly the reason for contestations between the different factions in the emerging system. In a country where education and training were seen to have been the privilege of the few, the main original proponent of a new system, namely organised labour, is possibly seen as a threat to the ‘positional good’ of formal, institutional learning (Raffe, 2005, p. 27) traditionally only available to the white minority. Thus, while there may be valid educational and epistemological reasons for the view that education and training is ‘incommensurable’ (Raffe, 2005), these reasons are overlaid by the socio-political aspirations of the new order.

In addition, unlike a system such as the Scottish NQF, which reflects strong, well-established and trusted sub-frameworks, the previous system in South Africa, was completely discredited, and any possible strengths that may have facilitated the development of an integrated approach to education and training, were disregarded.

This seems to explain the vehement defence of integration as the central principle upon which the South African system should be built. It would, therefore, be much

more difficult for politicians who intend to ‘reverse’ the NQF policy in South Africa (Jansen, 2004, p. 50), to do so without alienating the very people who have put them in power.

Finally, and this is evident in all national qualifications frameworks, a national policy will have no effect unless it is supported by the surrounding ‘institutional logic’ (Raffe, 1992), which focuses on enabling changes espoused in policy, in practice. The SANQF, in its formative years, seems to have fought the battle almost primarily at a policy and structural level. In South Africa, but also elsewhere in the world, an integrated or unified framework thus still seems to be at a conceptual level. The ideal of integrated frameworks seems to be something to be achieved in the future. From the literature it is becoming evident that a national policy could seriously be constrained if ‘the diversity of implementation pathways followed in practice’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 90) is not considered – hence the many different permutations of qualifications frameworks. This diversity may hint at some of the obstacles and impediments to the implementation of an integrated framework, but this is not clearly evident from the literature. While the benefits of an integrated approach to education and training are strongly supported and described in the literature, except at a general level, the literature does not provide examples of practice, where the contexts, timeframes, types of support and difficulties are described. Young (2005, p. 8) says that the introduction of national qualifications frameworks ‘is not a superficial reform that leaves most existing education and training provision able to go on as before’. It seems that integration as a principle, still lacks ‘a credible theory of action that would take these good ideas and implant them in educational practice’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 89). An integrated framework seems to require a completely different approach to ‘the way qualifications have traditionally been organised...and in the deeply embedded practices that underpin them’ (Young, 2005, p. 8). This inquiry hopes to contribute to the debates on integration and review the feasibility of an integrated framework for education and training systems.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:
THE USES AND MEANINGS OF INTEGRATION**

The National Qualifications Framework was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create. The NQF is a transformatory project, closely identified with the objective of ridding South Africa of its apartheid legacy and opening the doors of learning to all. This accounts for much of the passion that is invested in NQF implementation, and also for the depth of the disappointment that so few signs of progress are yet apparent.¹

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which the South African education and training system reflects in principle, perception and practice the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework. Four operational research questions inform the conceptual framework: Is the objective of an integrated South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) an example of policy symbolism? Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework? Can the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, enhance trust amongst partners in education and training? Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?

In 3.1 a general introduction to the conceptual framework is given. Section 3.2 deals with the first lens (or perspective) of an integrated framework – policy symbolism. Integration as the guiding philosophy of the SANQF is discussed in 3.3 while integration as the scope of the framework is dealt with in 3.4. The architecture of the framework and of qualifications, seen to enhance articulation between different components of the education and training system, is discussed in 3.5. Policy breadth (3.6) deals with the factors that are seen to be necessary for the meaningful implementation of large-scale reform of education and training in this country. In 3.7 and 3.8 integration is discussed on a meso- and micro level that is at the epistemological and curricular level. The uses and meanings of integration as a conceptual framework for this study are dealt with in 3.9. This chapter concludes with the ways in which the different perspectives of integration influence the conceptual framework and the research questions (3.10).

¹ DoE & DoL, 2002, p. xi.

3.1 Introduction

From the literature it is evident that the national qualification framework movement has become a worldwide trend. National qualification frameworks have been, or are being implemented in all four corners of the globe, in developed countries, as well as in developing countries. The persuasive logic for the movement seems to reside in systemic and global pressures: firstly, to improve the understanding of an education and training system within a country and in making progression routes and access to different parts of the national system explicit; secondly, to meet the needs of governments to make education and training more accountable by bringing all of the system in line with national policy; and thirdly, to provide for comparability across borders, particularly in regions where there is much mobility of students and workers.

It is a young movement. The oldest of the frameworks is seen to be the Scottish system, but it is important to note that the Scottish system has evolved from distinct and well-established sub-systems, which were completely autonomous. Only recently (in 2001) did the Scottish system formally establish its Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. In most of the first generation national qualification frameworks (Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, England and Wales), which, with the exception of South Africa were established in developed countries, the sub-systems of education and training were intact and relatively strong. The need for ‘integration’ thus evolved from emerging practice, and possibly the recognition that in a modern education and training system it is increasingly difficult to maintain a clear dichotomy between the different components of the system, and between those components and modern workplaces. While most of the established and emerging frameworks (partial and comprehensive) thus espouse the need for the unification of disparate components of the system, the ways in which integration/unification are interpreted, and the impacts that integration may have on the systems, are vastly different. Also, in South Africa, the interpretation of ‘integration’ as a key tenet of the new system is interpreted from different perspectives. The conceptual framework for this study is thus an exploration of the different meanings of ‘integration’ in order to elucidate the main research question, namely: *To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?*

[University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P \(2007\)](#)

The SANQF ‘became a point of convergence for organisations representing different interests and political orientations’ in a new South Africa, and ‘a strategic patch of common ground’ (DoE and DoL, 2002, p. 5). However, despite the belief that systemic articulation appears to be the best way to facilitate equity under conditions of differentiation (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992), an ‘integrated national framework’ is probably one of the most hotly contested ideals of the SANQF. Yet none of the critics of the SANQF is willing to say that integration is not central to the idea of the qualifications framework. The Study Team² that was responsible for the first review of the implementation of the SANQF, for example, suggested ‘there is general concern that the integration of education and training has not been achieved’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 22), but without stating what ‘integration’ would imply. It seems that one of the reasons for the limited progress in the achievement of this objective of the SANQF is that there is no common understanding of what it is that we mean when we talk about ‘an integrated framework’. The unintended consequence of this lack of common understanding is that the drivers of the SANQF and their partners have interpreted this concept in different ways (Heyns & Needham, 2004), which has led to contestation at its worst and systemic paralysis at the least. The contestation is most evident in the political impasse on the shape and the form of the NQF between the two sponsoring departments of the SANQF: the Department of Education and the Department of Labour. The review of the SANQF, which was initiated in 2001 by the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, has five years later, not yet been concluded. Systemic paralysis, owing to the unresolved tensions between these two Departments has resulted, for example, in contestations about responsibilities for standards setting and quality assurance, and the status of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) in relation to each other. This, in turn, has made the ETQAs unwilling to engage in the development of agreements around standards and quality assurance and the establishment of communities of practice. In the SAQA *National Qualifications Framework Impact Study* (SAQA, 2005, p. 73), for example, the lack of agreement is seen to be a major stumbling block in the further development and implementation of the SANQF:

The tension between ETQAs due to overlapping responsibilities is keenly felt and this seems to be compounded by the feeling that some ETQAs are

² *Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework* published by the Department of Education and the Department of Labour in April 2002.

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
more powerful than others [for example]: “There is the perception that
CHE is the authority and that they have more power”.

In my view, these problems are symptomatic of the poor conceptualisation of ‘integration’ as a workable idea. However, the problems of ‘who is responsible for what’ in terms of quality assurance, and ‘whose standards are considered to be the benchmark’ and more importantly, ‘who has the power’, reflect only some of the meanings of integration for the South African education and training system. The conceptual framework highlights at least seven meanings of integration:

1. Integration as policy symbolism
2. Integration as the guiding philosophy³ for the framework
3. Integration as the scope⁴ of the framework
4. Integration as the architecture⁵ of the framework
5. Integration as policy breadth⁶
6. Integration as a continuum of learning
7. Integration as curricular ‘integrability’⁷

These seven meanings, starting with ‘policy symbolism’ as evidence of the attempt by the new African National Congress (ANC) government to make a clean break with the past, have profoundly influenced the ‘guiding philosophy’ that underlies the development and implementation of a new education and training system for South Africa. The guiding philosophy of the SANQF deals with the social justice issues that were associated with apartheid education and training, but then progressively move from the abstract of an integrated framework at the conceptual level to attempts to come to grips with what an integrated framework means for the system. Integration then means ‘systemic comprehensiveness’, where the SANQF is intended to cover all levels and sectors of education and training, and deepens to mean the relationship between formal learning and the world of work and the perceived opposing epistemologies associated with discipline-based learning and workplace-based learning. Finally, integration has meaning for classroom practice. The conceptual

³ Based on the work of Raffe (2005), Granville (2003 and 2004), Young (2005), Tuck, Hart and Keevy (2004) and Keevy (2005).

⁴ As above

⁵ Keevy (2005)

⁶ As above

⁷ Keevy, (2006)

framework therefore encompasses every dimension of education and training, from a macro-political, to a micro-classroom level.

3.2 Integration as Policy Symbolism

The development of the SANQF is tied to the political and cultural context of a country that was marked with possibly the most disparate education and training system in the world. The previous system under apartheid was not the result of ‘benign neglect’, but a response to a purposeful and deliberate attempt to keep millions of people ‘in their place’ (Blom, 2006b, p. 1). French (2005, p. 54) makes the point that

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

The integration of education and training was thus proposed as ‘one of the central pillars in our Reconstruction and Development Programme’ (Manganyi, 1996, p. 3) and ‘was seen as a mechanism to acknowledge in no small measure the workers’ contribution to the struggle for freedom’ (Heyns & Needham, 2004, p. 33).

In his discussion of a ‘systemic discourse’, Kraak (1998, p. 4) says that the SANQF is a response to the ‘egalitarian pressures over the past three decades to reduce the gross social inequalities in South Africa’ and that a single national qualifications framework is meant to replace the highly differentiated and divisive education and training structures of the past.

An important part of the rationale for an integrated framework is the political support for the idea by education and labour. In the promulgation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, (Act No 58 of 1995), for example, Manganyi (1996, p. 1) noted that the Act ‘was recommended to Cabinet by two Ministers, not one, as a combined product’ and that it ‘won unanimous support of all political parties in Parliament’.

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

In view of the above, it would be easy to conclude that the idea of a national qualifications framework, and in particular the idea of integrating education and labour, is an example of policy symbolism. Given South Africa's history of prejudice and unfairness, it is perhaps not surprising that the first democratically elected government of the country saw the importance of creating symbols of a new order (Blom, 2006b) but, at the time, it certainly did not seem to be reduced to political symbolism:

The underlying concept is *an integrated approach to education and training*. The introduction and acceptance of this concept was a breakthrough in the development of thinking on the National Qualifications Framework. It is progressive and developmental, not prescriptive or dogmatic. It is not empty rhetoric. We take it seriously, both as a working concept within the Department of Education, and as the guiding concept in our relations with the Department of Labour and other departments with education and training responsibilities (Manganyi, 1996, p. 2)

Nevertheless, the difficulties experienced in balancing the interests of education and labour and the apparent power struggles between the two departments responsible for the SANQF may ultimately lead to 'dis-integration' (Heyns and Needham, 2004, p. 37). Several commentators, for example, Jansen (2004) and French (2005), have noted that the NQF was compromised from the beginning:

It does not take much logic to recognise that installing a department of education separate from a department of labour would immediately cancel out any profound expectation of creating "an integrated national framework for learning achievements" (Jansen, 2004, p. 88).

[A Ministry of Lifelong Learning was intended to] overcome the fierce historical division between education and training that was reflected in the territorial animosity of the former Department of Education and Training and the Department of Manpower (French, 2005, p. 56).

The power struggles evident between the two departments are well documented but, until recently, not openly acknowledged. However, in a response to the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework – Draft for discussion* (Ministry of Education, 2004) the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) (2004, p. 1) states:

NAPTOSA finds it perplexing and frustrating that the tensions between the Departments of Education and Labour are such that there is a very real danger that the rift will result in "territorial" imperatives and protection of sectoral interests (along the DoE/DoL, education/training,

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
academic/vocational divide) at the cost of integration across education and training and across formal, non-formal education and training opportunities.

In terms of the inquiry, I will investigate to what extent there is political will to enact the idea of an integrated framework, or whether indeed, ‘integration’ is one of those intractable ideals for the system.

3.3 Integration as Guiding Philosophy for the Framework

‘Integration’ is not only the first objective of the SANQF, but is also the first underpinning principle of the framework. Integration can thus be seen as the *guiding philosophy* of the SANQF, namely ‘the underlying thinking that implicitly, often covertly, underlies the development and implementation of [an] NQF’ (Keevy, 2005, p. 2).

In a response to the Study Team’s (DoE & DoL, 2002) review of the SANQF, for example, the Departments reiterate

‘[d]espite the difficulties in implementing ... the idea of an integrated framework of quality assured qualifications is a reference point for all new developments in our national learning system’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 1).

As a principle, ‘integration’ therefore purposes to (SAQA, 2001a, p. 9): ‘...form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training’.

In addition to this statement by the Departments, which confirms the centrality of ‘integration’ in the development and implementation of the SANQF, a set of underpinning principles expands on the guiding philosophy (SAQA, 2001a). The principles include *relevance, credibility, coherence, flexibility, standards, legitimacy, access, articulation, progression, portability, recognition of prior learning and guidance of learners*. In terms of the guiding philosophy as an aspect of the conceptual framework, all of these principles, in a sense, describe and unpack what is meant by the first principle: integration. The argument is that when integration is achieved, social value is assigned to all learning achievements (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 12), that is learning attained in education *and* training environments, which enhances parity of esteem of the learning regardless of where it was achieved. This in turn is

meant to lead to improved coherence of the system by valuing learning equally, and by recognising such learning in different contexts, which means that learners do not need to redo comparable aspects of programmes already achieved elsewhere. Such recognition of learning depends on the agreement on standards within a nationally agreed framework, which, if applied consistently, enables articulation between ‘different components of the [learning] system’ (SAQA, 2001a, p. 10), thereby facilitating meaningful progression through various ‘appropriate combinations of the [learning] system’ (SAQA, 2001a, p. 10). A coherent system using a commonly agreed framework of standards enables credits to be transferred between different sites of learning, that is it enhances the establishment of ‘multiple pathways to the same learning ends’ (SAQA, 2001a, p. 10) including pathways consisting of the recognition of prior learning (RPL). In the draft *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 1), this understanding is expressed as follows:

The [draft] policy...provides the basis for integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its structures for standards generation and quality assurance. It improves the coherence of the higher education system and facilitates the articulation of qualifications, thereby enhancing the flexibility of the system and enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another as they pursue their academic and professional careers.

Figure 3.1 demonstrates this understanding (from SAQA, 2001a, pp. 9–10).

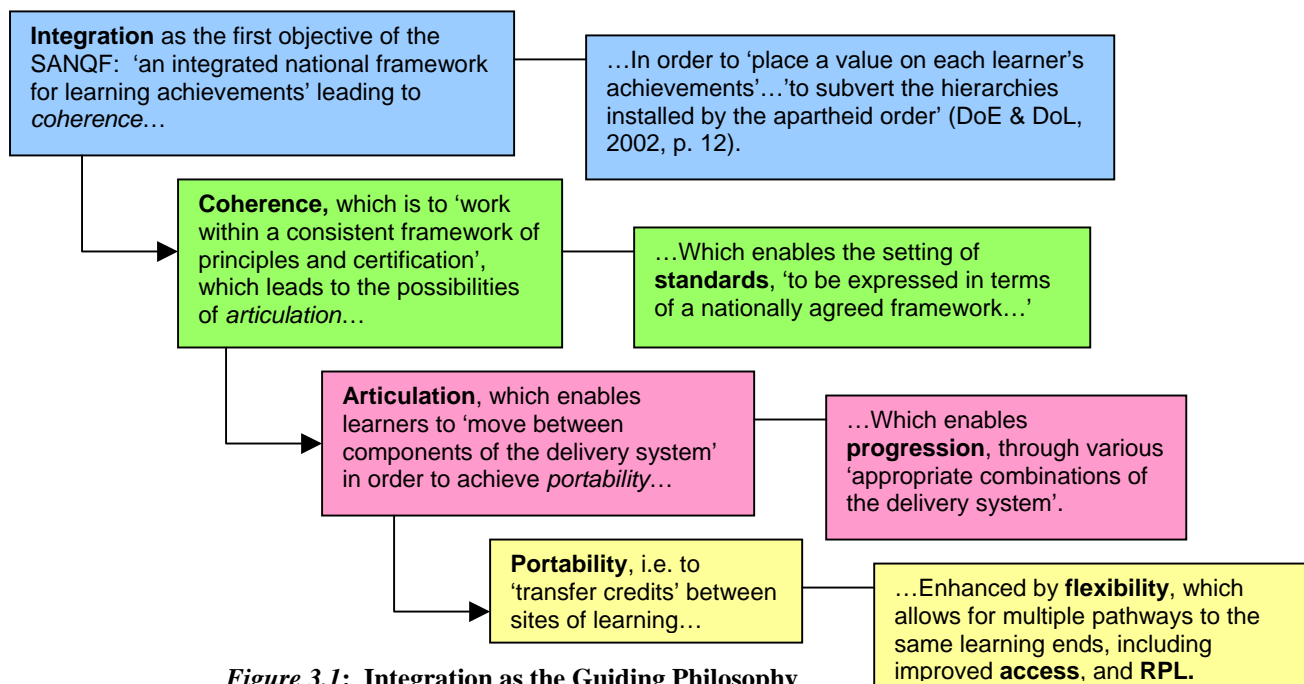


Figure 3.1: Integration as the Guiding Philosophy

While this understanding of integration seems to be the most enduring in terms of a guiding philosophy, ironically, it also seems to lead to the most acute paralysis of the system, perhaps because it means that the system as a whole has to be in agreement with more than only the single principle of an integrated framework. For this understanding to become meaningful, policy-makers and stakeholders have to agree that, in principle, all learning is valued equally and that it is possible to reach consensus on what (and whose) standards will be used to benchmark the learning against in order to facilitate articulation, progression and portability. In a discussion document (Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF, 1996, p. 18), it was noted, for example:

The education sector was concerned that education would lose its “soul”, that it would become narrow in focus, concentrating only on teaching that was required by the world of work – training, in other words. At the centre of their concern was the fear that education standards would decrease rapidly if training was to prescribe to education...The training sector, on the other hand, was afraid that the integration of education and training would lead to unreasonable demands for “high” academic standards in the training world; an imposition, it was claimed, that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for those who trained workers to adjust rapidly to employment demands when required.

In terms of my inquiry, this understanding of integration is very important. It is evident that this understanding emerged from the acknowledgement by the original thinkers about the SANQF, that in South Africa there exists, as a result of the Apartheid policies, ‘the most pernicious inequalities in the world in terms of human resource development’ (Mehl, 2004, p. 22). Mehl calls this ‘the great integrating vision of the NQF’, which

...stemmed from the recognition that if there is no change in the way in which qualifications are awarded in society, then little else will change easily. The way in which society recognises, rewards and measures learning achievement is through qualifications. It is society that provides the ultimate validation of qualifications and accords respect to the bearer. Society awards status and also opportunity and privilege.

The implications of this understanding for my inquiry could be that, were integration as a guiding philosophy abandoned, two things might result. (1) The attempt to lift the value of all learning, particularly learning attained through less formal, academic routes, could, if it were not successful, alienate the training sector and result in a philosophical ‘dis-integration’ of the system. (2) The proponents of integration could

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

see this as a betrayal of a large part of the population for whom integration was a key principle of the new education and training system. This is because an integrated framework was to ‘redress the effects of a hated order’ as an ‘instrument for human dignity and human rights’ (French, 2005, p. 54).

3.4 Integration as the Scope of the Framework

The first understanding then refers to integration as a symbol of the ‘[subversion] of the hierarchies installed by the apartheid order’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 12). However, such passion does not necessarily lead to a workable approach to the integration of education and training. The scope of the activities encompassed by the NQF could provide some answers and perhaps a more pragmatic understanding of integration.

Scope is ‘the measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationship between each on the NQF’ (Keevy, 2006, p. 2). In terms of the conceptual framework for this study, scope refers to *systemic coherence* of an education and training system. This understanding of integration has also been called the ‘macro’ level of the system (Heyns and Needham, 2004, p. 31), referring to the political decision by the post 1994 government to replace the then fragmented education and training system with a unitary system. The purpose to incorporate all of education and training, ‘...[h]aving all sectors of learning within one framework, subject to the same overall scheme of recognition, reflects the government’s policy that each sector relates to others and must be equally valued’ (DoE & DoL, 2002: p. 12). Integration in this context, therefore, deals with the relationship between academic and vocational sub-systems and levels and the extent to which parity of esteem between such sub-systems is achieved. On the face of it, this understanding of integration is not much different, and does not lead to any less problematic implementation, than integration as the guiding philosophy. The key difference lies in the term ‘unitary’. While the sub-systems remain relatively intact, that is education on the one hand, and training on the other, all such sub-systems and levels are captured and described within one framework, with links between the systems facilitated by systemic mechanisms such as joint planning, particularly learning and career pathway planning, but also budgeting and funding. Figure 3.2 reflects this understanding.

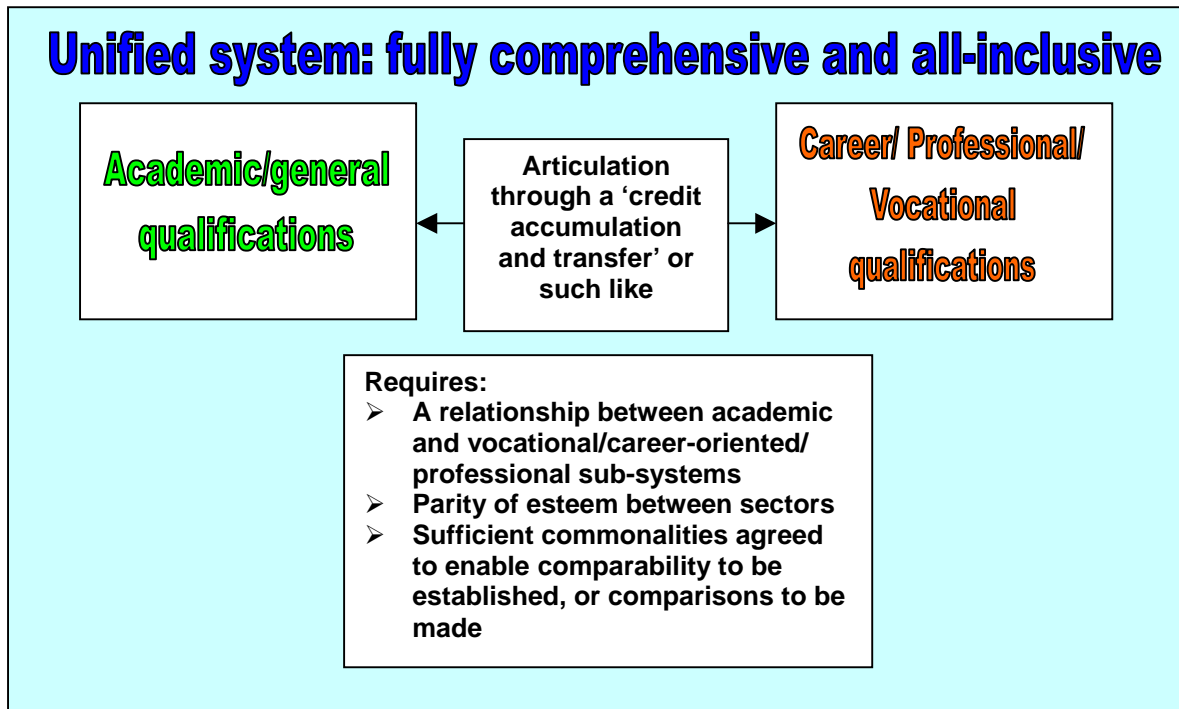


Figure 3.2: Integration as the Scope of the Framework

This understanding refers particularly to the ‘intrinsic logic’ of the education and training system (Raffe, 2003, p. 242). Intrinsic logic refers to ‘design features, such as flexible pathways and the establishment of equivalences between different qualifications’ (Tuck et al., 2004, p. 8). It is essentially a technical or instrumental approach to an education and training system, which requires that links between sub-sectors are developed, including learning and career pathways, to enable progression and credit transfer between the sub-systems.

‘Coherence’, ‘Articulation’ and ‘Portability’ (see Figure 3.1) then take on a structural dimension. Where qualifications, at a systemic level, for example, achieve equivalence in terms of the level at which they are offered, it is considered possible to articulate meaningfully with the other sub-sectors. The draft *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2004), for example, places the proposed ‘Advanced Diploma’ and ‘Bachelor’s Degree’ at the same level of the NQF, that is level 7, with the Advanced Diploma offered in a vocational/professional sector, but with links to the academic Bachelor’s Degree and vice versa.

Theoretically, the structural features of the system will then enhance parity of esteem between the sub-systems, where the articulation of credits attained in different contexts is agreed, jointly designed and mutually recognised (Heyns, 2005).

This form of integration leans towards a ‘linking’ of sub-systems. It is perhaps a more pragmatic view of integration in that there is the recognition that education and training have different purposes, and that such purposes are valid and valuable, but that each occupy a particular place in the system. A linked system entails separate sub-systems but with common structures for transferability. In the typology of NQFs (Tuck et al., 2004) (see Literature Review), systemic coherence in the form of links between sub-systems seems to be more prevalent.

In terms of this inquiry, perhaps this means that integration is to be understood as a comprehensive framework, with loose arrangements in terms of systemic coherence specifying links between sub-sectors, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF): ‘[T]he SCQF is a comprehensive framework...[that] includes higher education and academic and vocational qualifications, and aims to include informal learning’ (Scottish Executive, 2005: p. 1), with the intention to (SCQF, 2001, pp. 1 - 2):

- Make the relationships between qualifications clearer
- Clarify entry and exit points, and routes for progression
- Maximize the opportunities for credit transfer
- Assist learners to plan their progress and learning.

3.5 Integration as the Architecture of the Framework

The *architecture* of a national qualifications framework refers to the degree of prescriptiveness and ‘the stringency of the criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included’ on the framework (Raffe, 2003, in Tuck et al., 2004, p. 5). Such prescription is intended to be ‘precise enough to achieve coherence in the learning system but broad enough to permit maximum flexibility in the design of programmes depending on learning context’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 8). Prescriptiveness also has other purposes, such as comparable quality assurance and standards setting procedures and, consequently, increased accountability. The *architecture* in the context of integration is the extent to which diversity of learning in

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

different contexts is managed in order to enhance learner mobility and progression within the system. The argument is that if qualifications, regardless of where and by whom they are offered, meet the same minimum criteria, credit transfer is enhanced and quality assurance is facilitated. If the architecture is strictly specified then, according to Tuck et al. (2004, p. 9):

...common rules and procedures can be applied to different sectors of education and training [that enhances] a unified scope, particularly when they apply the same regulatory mechanisms across all sectors.

This understanding of integration utilises agreed standards, applied in a consistent and coherent manner, to enable participants to ‘transfer credits of qualifications or unit standards from one learning institution and/or employer to another’ (SAQA, 2001a, p. 9). One respondent in the SAQA NQF Impact Study Cycle 1 report (2004) spoke about a ‘credit matrix’, based on commonly agreed standards that would make the value and comparability of learning across contexts more explicit, that is ‘[w]e need to have a credit matrix that is formalised and managed outside the institution’s autonomy ...’ (2004, p. 41).

In South Africa, all qualifications have to meet a set of criteria in order to be considered a qualification. All qualifications at the same level, for example, have fundamental components, core components and elective components with the same or similar number of credits associated with each component⁸ with the purpose of achieving comparability between different sites and sectors of learning.

In the SAQA Cycle 1 report of the NQF Impact Study (2004, p. 41), for example, the comment was made that:

There was a high degree of agreement among providers that qualifications [i.e. the design] themselves were conducive to [coherence, articulation and] portability – “...in terms of the outcomes, both specific outcomes or exit level outcomes of qualifications, I think there is portability and [the possibility of subsequent] mobility [of learners]”

⁸ Fundamental – usually language, literacy and mathematical abilities

Core – the compulsory learning required in situations contextually relevant to the purpose of the qualification

Elective – usually a form of specialisation

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

Integration viewed in this manner is seen to be enhanced by common level descriptors which, as a first criterion, specify the depth and breadth of learning required at a particular level, for example:

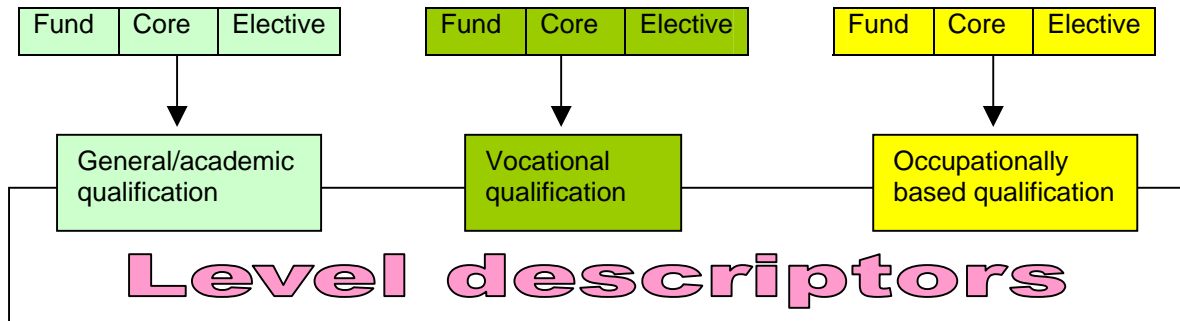


Figure 3.3: Integration as the Architecture of Qualifications

However, as in most other understandings of integration, this is contested terrain. A so-called one-size-fits-all approach to qualification design is seen to ignore ‘how the two forms of learning [academic and vocational/professional/occupationally based] might find distinct expression within a single framework’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 8). My inquiry will thus investigate to what extent common qualification design enables integration.

3.6 Integration as Policy Breadth

Policy breadth, according to the typology of national qualifications frameworks, refers to ‘the extent to which an NQF is directly and explicitly linked with other measures that influence how the framework is used’ (Keevy, 2006, p. 2). In South Africa, the NQF is seen to be one of the three pillars of the Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) of the government and it links with a series of statutes that were meant to support and complement the HRDS⁹. Raffe (2003, p. 242) also refers to this understanding of integration as ‘institutional logic’, meaning all the

...opportunities, incentives, and constraints arising from such factors as the policies of educational institutions (in their roles as providers and selectors), funding and regulatory requirements, timetabling and resource constraints, the relative status of different fields of study and the influence of the labour market and the social structure. A qualifications framework may be ineffective if it is not complemented by measures to reform the

⁹ For example, the South African Qualifications Authority Act (No 58 of 1995), the Skills Development Act (No 97 of 1998), the Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997) and the Further Education and Training Act (No 98 of 1998).

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
 surrounding institutional logic, for example, local institutional agreements to promote credit transfer, or encouragement to employers to reflect credit values in their selection processes.

This understanding of integration reflects how the sub-systems of the education and training sector could collaborate towards the achievement of a common ideal and the extent to which such systems' policies, regulations and implementation is congruent with the other partner's system. It deals with the development or expansion of communities of practice and the establishment of trust amongst partners. It encourages cooperation across sectors (for example, between the departments of education and labour), the formation of partnerships (for example, between education institutions and workplace-based providers and/or public and private education) and the sharing of the responsibility for the delivery and quality assurance of education and training provisioning (for example, sector education and training quality assurance bodies (SETAs) and band quality assurance bodies (higher education and general and further education and training bands). It therefore seeks ways in which the different components of the system could be complemented and enhanced through congruent regulation, budgeting, funding, shared responsibility and accountability. Again, it is evident that this understanding of integration is influenced by the guiding philosophy of the SANQF. Figure 3.4 takes the three pillars of the human resource development strategy (HRD, NSDS and NQF) to demonstrate this understanding:

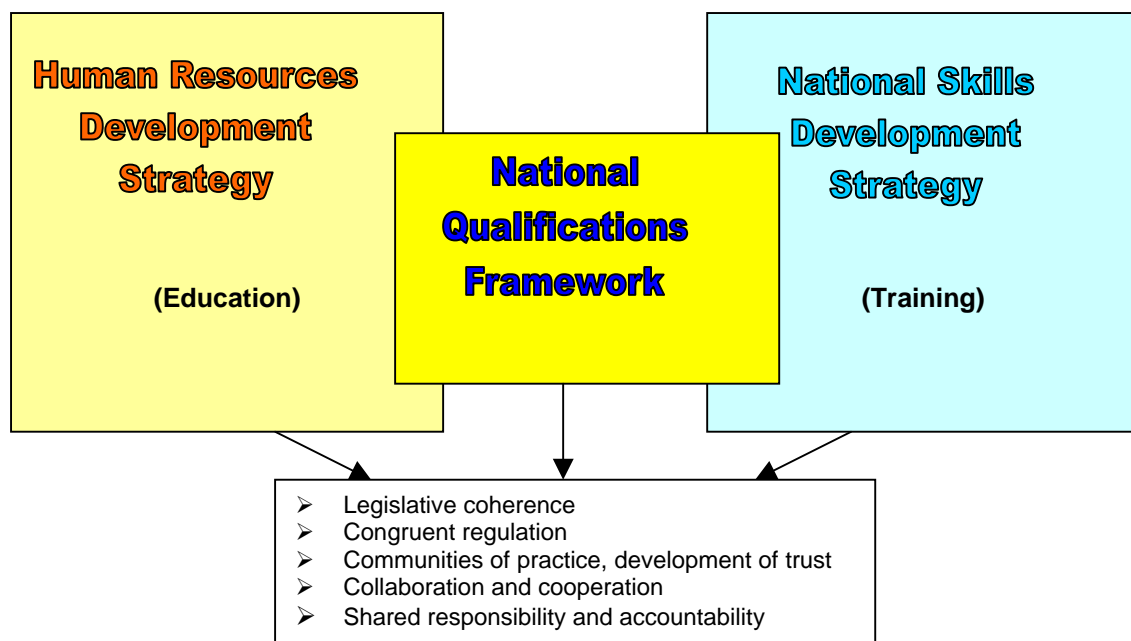


Figure 3.4: Integration as Policy Breadth

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

In the response to the Study Team's review of the SANQF, the two sponsoring departments of the NQF proposed a formal structure to deal with these links, namely a permanent Inter-departmental NQF Strategic Team with the responsibility to 'transcend the line function responsibilities of the two departments with a clear set of national priorities for which they are jointly responsible' (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 5), including responsibilities such as:

- [B]e a permanent point of liaison between [the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)] and the two departments
- Develop a broad national plan for the implementation of the NQF...
- Promote the alignment of NQF implementation with the government's [Human Resource Development (HRD)] strategy...
- Consult regularly with the National Treasury on the funding of NQF implementation...

These responsibilities were intended to 'consolidate the policy-making process, integrate the planning function, and thus eliminate the void that encouraged jurisdictional dispute and strategic drift...' (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 39).

The meaning of this understanding of integration provides a different lens for my inquiry. If integration means 'collaboration, co-operation, joint planning and funding', then the study will investigate whether the current system is progressively achieving such goals. This is an objective strongly espoused by all the players in education and training. For example, in *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework* (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 26), one of the responsibilities of the proposed Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs) is to

...collaborate with other QCs on all matters of mutual interest [thereby] promoting communities of trust in qualifications design, standards generation and quality assurance within its sector.

3.7 Integration as a Continuum of Learning

The phrase 'continuum of learning' was first used by the Study Team responsible for the review of the SANQF (DoE & DoL, 2002) to indicate the position of the two main epistemologies, that which deals with education and that with training. It was used to show that learning occurs on a continuum (or several continua according to Raffe (2005, p. 23)) that may start at learning of the abstract (primarily theory in institutionally based environments) and learning of the praxis (in workplace-based

environments) and vice versa, depending on the purpose and context of the qualification. In the response to the review of the SANQF, the departments were of the opinion that:

In South Africa, as elsewhere, the two worlds of discipline-based learning (mainly in institutions) and skills development (mainly in the workplace, including professional practice), have co-existed uneasily within the common qualifications framework. There is an implicit tension between the two perspectives (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 6).

However, in establishing an integrated approach to education and training, the departments noted that ‘... in fact, [they are not] opposites but equally essential facets of the same national learning system’. Moreover, they observed that the SANQF ‘is a vital mechanism for holding the tension between them and bringing out the complementary and mutually reinforcing attributes of institutional and workplace learning’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 7). This understanding of integration has also been dubbed the ‘meso-level’ of integration (Heyns & Needham, 2004, p. 35).

The extent to which the purposes and rationale of a qualification are defined by the pursuit of discipline-based learning (education) or by the utility value in the workplace (training), places a qualification (or set of related qualifications) in a particular place along the continuum. The yellow star in Figure 3.5, for example, indicates that a particular qualification is mostly about the development of discipline-based knowledge, but with some tentative connectivity to the world of work. The red star, for a qualification at the opposite end of the continuum, would therefore be much more occupationally oriented.

Both the departments (DoE & DoL, 2003) and Raffe (2005) however, note that there are not only these two extremes. The departments mention a third dimension, a ‘career-focused’ or ‘general vocational’ qualification, which ‘looks both ways’. This type of qualification is reflected as the green arrow below.

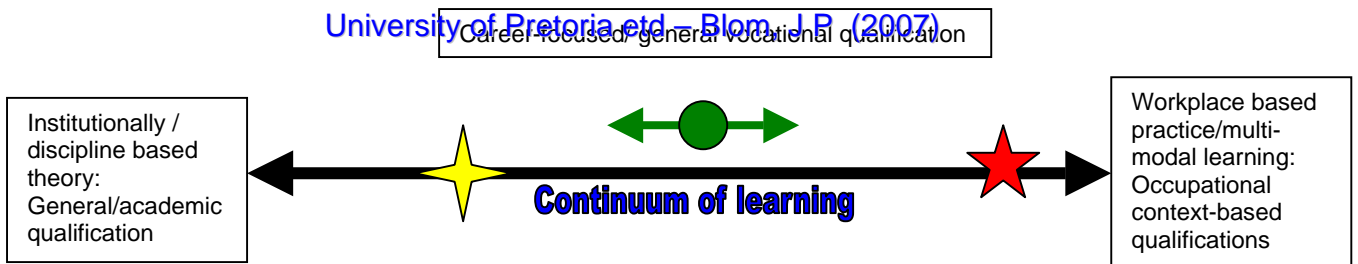


Figure 3.5: Integration as a Continuum of Learning

An attempt to clarify the continua of learning, and the complementarity of the two main epistemologies, was made in *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework* (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 21) by acknowledging that in the design of qualifications ‘both disciplinary specialists and expert workplace practitioners are needed’, which will result in three broad types of qualifications:

- *Partnered pairs of qualifications.* These are linked by a common purpose, but separately assessed [for example occupational and professional training]. Learners first get a discipline-based qualification, irrespective of where it may be required, and then those who wish to achieve full occupational recognition proceed to structured practice in the work situation which is formally assessed by industry trade bodies or professional bodies.
- *Stand-alone discipline-based qualification with a component of workplace practice.* This is the traditional co-operative education model (which the technikons [universities of technology] have exemplified), where the practice is integrated and does not lead to a stand-alone qualification but may or may not carry occupational recognition, depending on the field; and
- *Stand-alone occupational context-based qualification with a component of discipline-based study.* The new Learnership programmes illustrate this type of partnership. The theoretical component of the qualification is fully integrated with the occupational context-based programme.

In terms of this study, this perspective of integration may be the most workable systemic solution but, as it stands, it does not make provision for a general formative qualification where neither workplace practice, nor a partnered qualification leading to professional registration is present. For this reason, the final understanding of integration, that of curricular integrability, is defined.

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)
3.8 Integration as Curricular ‘Integrability’

The last of the understandings is closely associated with the sixth, but brings the meaning of integration to a classroom practice level. This understanding of integration deals with ‘the measure of integration of theoretical and practical components as contained in the ... curriculum’ (Keevy, 2006, p. 9) and the most appropriate mix of theory and practice in the learning programme. This understanding has also been referred to as the ‘micro’ level of integration (Heyns & Needham, 2004). With the emergence of ‘mode 2’ knowledge (Kraak et al., 2000) and the acceptance of the notion of ‘applied knowledge¹⁰’ (SAQA, 2001a) in South Africa, *curricular integration* is becoming more prominent. Raffe (2005, p. 24), for example, notes that ‘curricular integration’ intends to

...encourage learners to combine different types of learning (e.g. applied and theoretical), to develop integrated forms of learning and knowledge, to promote transferable and generic skills, or to promote parity of esteem.

The *National Commission on Higher Education Report: A framework for Transformation* (1996, in SAQA, 2001b), for example, notes:

The demands of the future and the situation of South Africa as a developing country require that programmes, while necessarily diverse, should be educationally transformative. Thus they should be planned, coherent and integrated; they should be value-adding, building contextually on learners’ existing frames of reference; they should be learner-based, experiential and outcomes-oriented; they should develop attitudes of critical enquiry and powers of analysis; and they should prepare [learners] for continued learning in a world of technological and cultural change.

Integration in this context then means the level and extent to which curricula and learning programmes are designed in terms of cooperative programmes that may include, on the one hand, structured learning in the workplace following exposure to theory at an institution and, on the other hand, advanced study in the workplace. Terms such as ‘internships’, ‘experiential learning’ and, more recently, in South Africa, ‘learnerships’, reflect the move towards curricular integration, which intends to enable learners to apply what they have learnt. Figure 3.6 explains this notion.

¹⁰ Applied knowledge is defined as a combination of foundational knowledge, practical knowledge and reflective understanding.

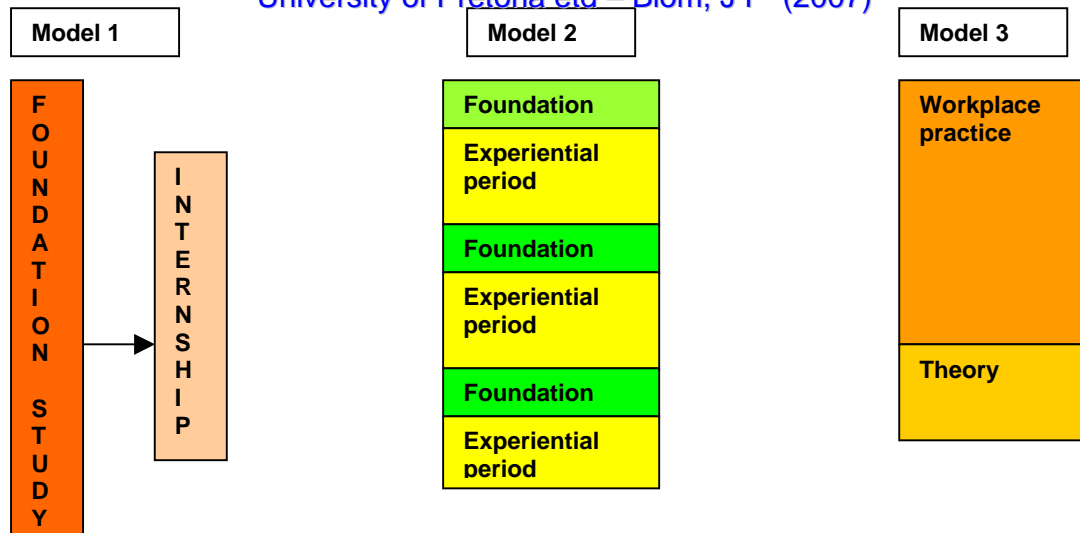


Figure 3.6: Integration as Curricular Integrability

Much of the debate about integration in the South African education and training system has centred on the view that ‘education and training [epistemologies] respectively represent distinct knowledge structures, distinct modes of learning and distinct social relations. They are ‘incommensurable’, and they cannot be sensibly combined with a single framework (Raffe, 2005, p. 22) but, according to Pring (in Raffe, 2005, p. 22), this is a ‘false dualism’, because education and training ‘describe distinct purposes of learning, but as practices they are not mutually exclusive.’

Curricular integrability and the partnerships to be formed between education and training institutions, and education and workplace-based institutions, to enable curricular integration to take place, seems, according to Heyns and Needham (2004, p. 44) to hold the greatest promise for the achievement of the integrative intent of the SANQF if ‘[a]n integrated approach implies a view of learning which rejects a rigid division between “academic” and “applied”, “theory” and “practice” (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 67) and it ‘seeks to promote an integrated learning of theory, practice and reflection’ (DoE, 2002,p. 6).

This view of integration provides yet another perspective on the inquiry. If ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ are not directly correlated with ‘education’ and ‘training’ or, rather, ‘caricatures of education and training’ (Raffe, 2005, p. 26), and if learning is seen to be multidimensional, then there is much persuasive logic in teaching and learning that reflect such practices.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework intends to throw light on integration from different, but related perspectives. While it is evident that these perspectives are interrelated, the different lenses, sharpens the integrative possibilities and constraints of an integrated framework. It hopes to determine the feasibility of an integrated framework by looking critically at each of these dimensions as interdependent notions of an integrated framework. The conceptual muddle that is ‘integration’ is described in this inquiry in its symbolic, structural and pragmatic forms, as well as in practice, with the purpose of adding to the widely supported principle of an integrated framework. Table 3.1 summarises the different perspectives.

Table 3.1.
Summary of the Different Meanings of Integration

	Lens/perspective	Meaning in relation to integration
1	Political symbolism	The extent to which integration is seen as a symbol of the break with the past
2	Guiding philosophy	The extent to which integration enables parity of esteem through valuing all learning equally
3	Scope	The extent to which all the sub-systems, levels, types of qualification and sectors are included on the framework
4	Architecture	The extent to which common design features for qualifications and quality assurance procedures enable progression in learning and career paths
5	Policy breadth	The extent to which legislation, regulation, planning and funding are congruent with partner organisations’ legislative and regulatory frameworks
6	Continuum of learning	The extent to which the two main epistemologies are considered complementary to each other
7	Curricular integrability	The extent to which the curriculum reflects the teaching of theory, supported by practice

3.9 The Uses and Meanings of Integration as a Conceptual Framework for the Study

The different meanings of integration will be used as a conceptual lens to explore the main research question: *To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an*

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

integrated national qualifications framework? In summary, the conceptual framework and the research questions are represented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.

Conceptual Framework

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION	
To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?	
<i>Supporting questions</i>	<i>Conceptual framework</i>
Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?	Integration as political symbolism and the guiding philosophy of the SANQF
Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework?	Integration as the scope of the SANQF and the architecture of qualifications
Can the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?	Integration as policy breadth
Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?	Integration as continua of learning Integration as curricular integrability

Viewing integration through the lens of a *political symbolism* and the *guiding philosophy* could provide an answer to the supporting question: *Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?* Jansen (2004, p. 88) says that the SANQF ‘promised what it could never deliver in practice’ because

...it has a lot to do with the idealism and euphoria of policymaking in the years immediately preceding and following the formal installation of a democratic government in 1994. Put bluntly, we got carried away. ...some of us have called [this] the over-investment in policy symbolism [while] others have observed [this] as the tremendous moral imperatives that underwrote the education and training policies of the first post-apartheid government...[W]e believed in the redemptive power of policy, and we are paying the price.

Yet, in many other countries where national qualification frameworks are being implemented, but where the ‘moral imperatives’ are not the same as in South Africa, and therefore there is no need to venture into political symbolism, an integrated framework is an ideal that is pursued. Keevy (2005, p. 163), for example, says that

most NQFs are migrating towards a linked, or even unified framework, (as is the case with the SCQF):

This category [of frameworks] presents the best position of compromise for governments: such NQFs are regulatory and can therefore be used to effect large-scale transformation; they...offer some progress towards greater parity of esteem between general education and vocational training.

It seems therefore that, while integration certainly is a political symbol of the break with the apartheid past and the guiding philosophy for the SANQF, it is also more than that: it is a stated intent and, in South Africa, is strongly espoused by all policy-makers. This is evident in every new interpretation of what the SANQF should look like. For example, in a number of draft discussion documents emanating from the Departments of Education and of Labour (2005 and 2006) on the new configuration of the SANQF, the principle of an integrated approach to education and training is confirmed and described as a holistic view of learning, where the value and esteem of knowing and doing are acknowledged and the need for bridges between the workplace and the classroom is considered crucial. In addition, the integrated approach is closely associated with the democratic project in order to affirm the dignity of all socially useful learning and the redress of past inequalities (Blom, 2006a). This lens will therefore attempt to elucidate how 'a profound philosophy of education and training wrapped up in [the] five simple statements of ambition'¹¹ [for the system] ...could enable these good ideas to take root and flourish with the education and training system' (Jansen, 2004, p. 90).

The third and fourth meanings of integration, namely the *scope* of the system, and the *architecture* of qualifications, could provide a perspective on how integration is intended to work on a practical level. The SANQF and the SCQF are possibly the only two examples of qualification frameworks where all levels, sectors and types of qualifications (and how they relate to each other), are included on the framework. If integration means *comprehensiveness, all-inclusiveness* (see Figure 3.2 preceding),

¹¹ Create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
Facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
Enhance the quality of education and training;
Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and career paths;
Contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large

University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P (2007)

then this lens is starting to make clear what the technical aspects of the SANQF should be. Integration, from this perspective, ‘refers to systemic coherence’ (Keevy, 2006, p. 3), and also to commonalities in the design of qualifications. The study will therefore ask: *Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework?*

The fifth understanding of integration, *policy breadth*, in my view, deepens and expands on *scope* and *architecture*, as it takes the possibilities of connectivity between different components and different types of qualifications further and elaborates on how sub-systems in education and training could collaborate through congruent legislation, regulation, planning and funding. The question: *Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?* will be viewed through this lens.

The sixth and seventh meanings of integration have been separated for the conceptual framework to highlight two issues: the debate about the ‘incommensurability’ of a framework encompassing different epistemologies and; the increasing emergence of curricular integration which intends to reduce the distance between theory and practice, between theoretical and applied knowledge. However, in using this lens, it is evident that these two understandings are difficult to separate: the purpose of qualifications cannot (and should not) be seen as separate from the curricula and learning programmes that will enable the achievement of the purpose of the qualification. The research question that will deal with this understanding of integration is: *Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?*

3.10 Conclusion

Eleven years after the promulgation of the South African Qualifications Authority Act (Act No 58 of 1995) and nine years following the implementation of the South African National Qualifications Framework, it is becoming increasingly evident how difficult it is to implement large-scale reform of an education and training system, particularly, as is the case in South Africa, when there is an intense sense of urgency. This conceptual framework has developed from the deeply (and dearly) held beliefs of what an ideal education and training system should be like, and which are often a

muddle of emotions, passions and emerging practice. Integration, as a principle, is encouraged in most national qualification frameworks, but in South Africa it is seen to be ‘completely central’ (Heyns and Needham, 2004) to the transformatory project. This seems to be because integration means many different things and is vested with much symbolism, but at the same time is also attempting to be pragmatic in relation to systemic reform. In the *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* (Education Department, African National Congress, 1994, p. 15), the perspectives on integration, namely policy symbolism, guiding philosophy, scope, architecture, policy breadth, continua of learning and curricular integrability, are all present, albeit not explicitly stated:

The ANC’s policy discussion document gives a firm commitment to a single National Qualification Framework:

“South Africa will have a national system of education and training which enables citizens to become progressively qualified in a lifelong process. By integrating education and training in one system with a credit-based qualifications framework, all citizens’ chances to develop their capacities will be radically increased, whether they are in full-time or part-time study, employed or unemployed, in general education or in occupational preparation. The system will be learner-centred and achievement led” (ANC, 1994, p.15).

According to the ANC’s policy statement, a single national qualifications framework purposes to be a key part of a strategy designed to overcome divisions inherited from the apartheid system of education and training. These divisions include racial divisions in the management, funding and provision of education and training; divisions between sectors of learning such as general education, training and adult basic education and training; and, divisions between theory, associated with academic education and, practice, associated with vocational and occupationally directed training. The new ANC policy (1994) therefore aimed to overcome the stunted view of industrial education as inflexible, narrow and task-based, and primarily suitable for manual workers, and enable the vast majority of South Africans to re-enter and progress through the education and training system. Further, it intends to recognise and value all learning and make education and training more accessible to those who have not followed formal routes of education and thus, remove the barriers to progression for youth and adult learners from ‘lower order skills, often acquired in the “training” system to professional skills acquired in the tertiary “education” system’ (ANC, p. 15). This is what an integrated national qualifications framework is

[University of Pretoria etd – Blom, J P \(2007\)](#)
required to achieve. However, commentators (such as Granville, 2004 and Jansen, 2004) note that such high expectations of an education and training system seem unreasonable, and that perhaps this ‘has a lot to do with the idealism and euphoria of policymaking in the years immediately preceding and following the formal installation of a democratic government in 1994’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 88). This study therefore explores the different meanings of integration in order to determine the extent to which such meanings are reflected in practice and, indeed, whether the ideal of an integrated national qualification framework is achievable, or whether it will remain an unattainable goal.