

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The Impact Study project of SAQA is easily one of the most sophisticated measurement and monitoring systems that I have yet witnessed to emerge in South Africa. Its sophistication lies in its self-critical posture and its consciousness of the limits and potential of impact studies, especially in its more quantitative conception.¹

This chapter deals with the research design and methods used for the study. The design and methods are based on a cyclical, longitudinal study undertaken by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the NQF Impact Study, which was initiated to determine the extent to which the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) impacts on the transformation of education and training in South Africa. For that reason, my position as researcher in relation to the two concluded cycles of the NQF Impact Study is presented upfront and in detail in 4.1. The background to this study, as it relates to the NQF Impact Study, is discussed in 4.2. The research questions are dealt with in 4.3 and the specific design that informed the study is described in 4.4. Sampling and data collection, including additional data collection subsequent to the conclusion of Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact study, are presented in 4.5. The data sources for the study are briefly discussed in 4.6, including data from sources other than the data collected for the NQF Impact Study and the additional interviews conducted for this study. Data analysis is described in 4.7. In 4.8 the validity and reliability of the study are discussed. This chapter concludes by indicating the relationship between the Research Questions and the findings chapters (4.9).

¹ Jansen, 2004.

4.1 The Investigator's Position

I currently hold the position of Deputy Director: Research, at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), heading up the research division. I was thus intimately involved in the conceptualisation, development and implementation of the two concluded cycles of the NQF Impact study, which is the basis for this study. My responsibilities included the management of the project, which entailed the drafting of a concept document, terms of reference for the study, financial management, allocation of resources and the management of external local research consultancies. However, the project was a team effort that involved not only the Research Unit, and myself as the head of the Unit in particular, but also an internal Working Group², an Advisory Group³, and two international consultants⁴. In addition, a small group of academics critiqued the draft Impact Indicators, commented on the research instruments, and prepared commissioned papers⁵ after the conclusion of Cycle 1, while respondents in focus groups interrogated and made inputs to the development of the draft Impact Indicators. All of these were involved at different stages of the development of the concept of the Impact Study, the Impact Indicators, the research design and the methodology. The conceptualisation stage required much interaction with the different groups, but their involvement became less in Cycle 2, largely because the research design and Impact Indicators had been piloted in Cycle 1.
























Figure 4.1 illustrates the involvement of the different parties (from Keevy, 2006b).

² Members of staff representing the different directorates of the South African Qualifications Authority: the Directorate Quality Assurance and Development; the Directorate Standards Setting and Development; the Directorate National Learners' Records Database.

³ Consisting largely of SAQA Board members and members of the Executive Office of SAQA

⁴ Prof. Gary Granville from Ireland and Mr Ron Tuck from Scotland

⁵ Prof. Gary Granville, Prof. Jonathan Jansen and Mr Botshabelo Maja

	Conceptualisation	Initial research design, proposals and impact indicators	Pilot study (Cycle 1)	Baseline study (Cycle 2)
SAQA Board				
Advisory Group				
Working Group				
Research Unit				
International consultants				
Local consultancies				
Academic community				
Other NQF stakeholders				




Key:  Champion  Direct involvement  Indirect involvement

Figure 4.1. Involvement of Different Groups in the NQF Impact Study

At the time of the conceptualisation of the study (2002/2003) and the first application of the research design (2004/2005) the Research Unit consisted of only two full-time staff, one staff member at 50% time and a temporary research assistant. Beyond the conceptualisation of the study, the Research Unit was therefore responsible for most of the data collection in Cycle 1 and for a large part of the data collection in Cycle 2 (see shaded areas in Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Data Collection Responsibilities: Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study

Cycle 1	Data collection	Cycle 2	Data collection
External literature review	Paul Musker and Associates (PMA)	Survey questionnaire ⁶	SAQA Research Unit
Contextualisation interviews	SAQA Research Unit	ETQA interviews	SAQA Research Unit
Analysis of new qualifications	Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE)	Departmental interviews	SAQA Research Unit
Employer interviews	SAQA Research Unit	Provider interviews	SAQA Research Unit

⁶ The SAQA Research Unit administered 77 questionnaires as an audit component for the outsourced survey conducted by an external research consultancy.

Table 4.1 (continued)***Data Collection Responsibilities: Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study***

Cycle 1	Data collection	Cycle 2	Data collection
Focus groups	SAQA Research Unit	Organised labour interviews	SAQA Research Unit
Departmental interviews	SAQA Research Unit	Quantitative analysis of NLRD data	The SAQA Directorate: NLRD
Organised labour interviews	SAQA Research Unit	Survey questionnaire	Education Foundation Trust (EFT)
Provider interviews	SAQA Research Unit	Analysis of new qualifications	Education Foundation Trust (EFT)
		Literature review	SAQA Research Unit

In terms of the data collection, in addition to administering the survey questionnaire across all stakeholder groupings (see ‘Sampling’ discussed later), I was personally responsible for a third of the semi-structured interviews and focus groups of both cycles. In addition, in Cycle 1, I was responsible for the data analysis of the ‘provider interviews’, taken up in the Cycle 1 report as Annexure 9 (18 interviews) as part of my contribution to the Cycle 1 report (SAQA, 2004, pp. 1–36). In Cycle 2, in addition to conducting the literature review and writing chapter 3 (‘Second Cycle Contextualisation’, SAQA, 2005, pp. 23–35), I was once again responsible for the analysis of the ‘provider interviews’, taken up in the Cycle 2 report as Annexure 4 (19 interviews) (SAQA, 2005, pp. 1–92) against a set of codes jointly agreed by the team members (SAQA, 2005, Appendix 3, pp. 92, 93). Each member of the main research team⁷ also had the responsibility of triangulating the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data sources (see Table 4.1 above), according to the Impact Indicators and in writing up the findings. I was personally responsible for presenting the findings of the following Indicators:

#6 Integrative approach (SAQA, 2005, pp. 52–54)

#7 Equity of access

#8 Redress practices

#11 Assessment practices

#15 Quality assurance practices

Finally, particularly in Cycle 2, the overall coherence and logic of the report benefited from the engagement and inputs from the three SAQA researchers and the international consultant. While the research report can thus be considered a team

⁷ Ronel Blom, James Keevy, Seamus Needham from South Africa and Ron Tuck from Scotland

effort, my contribution, conceptually, related to ‘an integrative approach’ and the related Impact Indicators, such as ‘portability of qualifications’ (see Table 4.2) and ‘parity of esteem’⁸.

My direct and intimate involvement in the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study may influence this study in two ways. Firstly, as an employee of an organisation responsible for developing and implementing a macro policy intended to reform education and training in this country, my personal commitment to the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) may inhibit a critical interrogation of the assumptions upon which such a reform is based. Indeed, in Report 1, the research team explicitly states that the two concluded cycles of the NQF Impact Study do not ‘attempt to evaluate the rationale, aims or Objectives of the NQF as such. These remain as a given...’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 11). Secondly, in the light of the contested nature of the SANQF and the proposed changes to the governance of the SANQF and the role of the organisation that I work for in the sector, my inclination could be to ‘defend’ SAQA’s position and, more particularly, the findings of the two Impact studies. Nevertheless, the research team felt that the conceptualisation, design and audit processes were sufficiently robust to stand by the validity of the study – to the extent that a deliberate decision was taken by the research team to stay outside of the current debates and to focus on the empirical evidence emerging from the studies (SAQA, 2004, p. 67):

Although NQF *architecture* and *processes* remain an important part of the contextualization of future cycles of the Study, it is important that the Study is not drawn into a debate that at the time of measurement may be in the public domain, but that will offer very limited researchable evidence.

Nevertheless, while social research is always located within a particular context and therefore represents a particular perspective, the emerging evidence should speak for

⁸ See Heyns and Needham (2004), *An Integrated National Framework for Education and Training in South Africa: Exploring the issues*; Blom, (2005). *Integration, Portability and Articulation: Policy Symbolism or Policy Practice? Lessons from the NQF Impact Study – Cycle 2*. Paper prepared for the Learning Cape Festival, 2 August 2005, Cape Town; Blom, (2006b), *The South African National Qualifications Framework: An integrative and socially cohesive approach to the alignment of qualifications and skills*. Seminar held at the Scottish Executive Education Department, Edinburgh, 25 April 2006; and Blom, R. (2006c). *Parity of esteem: Hope or despair?* Paper prepared for the 4th annual SADC conference: Assessment in Education, 25 – 30 June 2006, University of Johannesburg.

itself, even if the evidence seems to contradict my own beliefs, or point to weaknesses in the underlying assumptions of the education and training reform impulses that inform the development and the implementation of the SANQF. SAQA, as an organisation, has always claimed that it is committed to ‘intellectual scrutiny’. This study hopes to contribute to such scrutiny and I trust that I will be able to present the findings honestly and with the minimum of bias.

4.2. Background to the Study

This study is a further and more detailed analysis of data collected for the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) study conducted and concluded in 2004 and 2005, chiefly in relation to the notion of an integrated framework and associated principles such as portability, progression and articulation. The NQF Impact Study is a longitudinal, cyclical study of the impact of the NQF, with the purpose ‘to achieve the effective measurement of the impact of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on the transformation of education and training in South Africa’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 3). Two cycles of the study have been completed – Cycle 1 in 2004 and Cycle 2 in 2005. Cycle 1 had as its purpose ‘to establish the criteria against which to measure the progress of the NQF’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 8) and Cycle 2 ‘to establish the baseline against which to measure the progress of the NQF’ (SAQA, 2005, p. 3). The study is an indicator-based study, which took as its central point of departure the five NQF objectives, which are to (SAQA, 2004, p. 8):

1. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2. facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The first cycle was concerned with the establishment of a research design and the piloting of the draft *Impact Indicators*, which were defined as (SAQA, 2004, p. 16):

...a policy relevant, quantitative and/or qualitative statistic designed to provide a profile of the current condition, the stability or change, the functioning, and/or effect of the NQF on the transformation of education and training in South Africa.

The main purpose of the Impact Indicators is ‘to give information to policy makers about the state of the education system to help them in policy analysis, policy evaluation and policy formulation’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 16).

The second cycle was concerned with the establishment of a baseline of information in relation to the Impact Indicators against which future measurements of the impact of the NQF on education and training will be made (SAQA, 2005).

This research design for the NQF Impact Study is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

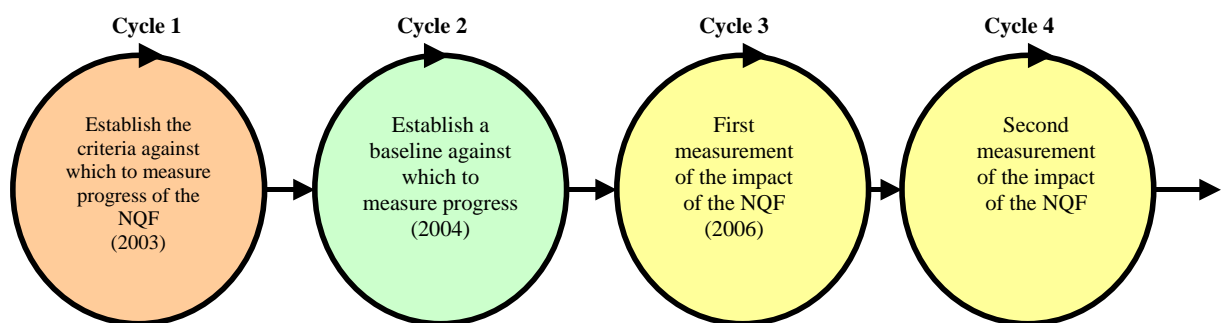


Figure 4.2: Research Design for the NQF Impact Study

Based on three important considerations that underpinned the research design, namely *replicability*, *cost-effectiveness* and *credibility*, the research design of Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study comprised the following components (Blom & Keevy, 2005):

- Premised on the five NQF objectives
- Longitudinal and comparative
- Three common components, namely contextualisation, data gathering and findings and recommendations
- Indicator-based methodology
- Purposive quota sampling
- Data collection through interviews, analysis of qualifications and a national survey

In the development of the research design, the five NQF objectives formed a fixed point of reference that would allow the research design to evolve yet remain relatively stable. Importantly, this decision also meant that the research design was underpinned by the assumption that the NQF objectives were valid and well supported.

The research design evolved from a critical engagement with the five NQF objectives. The research team argued that the objectives were ‘too broad and generalised’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 13) to be used as a basis for quantitative and qualitative work and thus derived three research questions as lenses for the ‘NQF in operation’ (SAQA, 2004, p. 14). These questions are (SAQA, 2004, p. 14):

- To what extent has practice changed as a result of the implementation of the NQF?
- To what extent have mindsets changed as a result of the introduction of the NQF?
- To what extent has the NQF enabled the development of education and training relevant to a changing world?

The application of these three questions to the NQF objectives resulted in an extensive pool of 200 potential impact indicators, which was finally reduced to a suite of 23 draft impact indicators, organised into four sets.

Thus (SAQA, 2004, p. 13):

...the research design that emerged...has as a central spine the relationship between the NQF objectives and the Impact Indicators. The development of the Research Questions and the categorisation of the draft Impact Indicators into four Sets were tools used by the team to facilitate the research process.

The relationships are described in Figure 4.3 (from SAQA, 2004, p. 14)

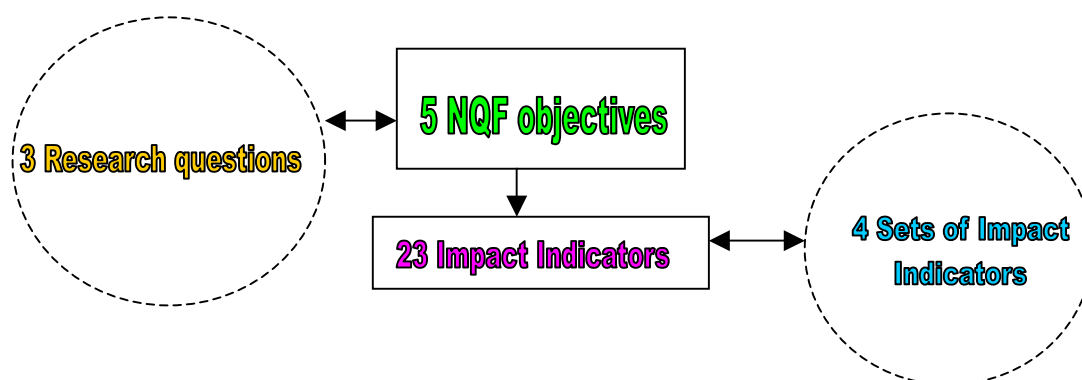


Figure 4.3. Relationships within the Research Design

Three common components are to be included in each new application of the research design:

- *Contextualisation* – the purpose of the contextualisation is to outline the current issues of NQF implementation both in South Africa and internationally. It defines a context for interpreting and using findings from the NQF Impact Study.
- *Data gathering* – using structured sampling methods.
- *Development of findings and recommendations* – based on the analysis of the data gathered, and related to the context and the period in which the study takes place.

After extensive piloting in Cycle 1, the twenty-three impact indicators used in Cycle 1 were reduced to seventeen impact indicators in Cycle 2 (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Impact Indicators: Cycle 2

	Impact Indicator	Level of Impact
Set 1	<i>The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and the South African society</i>	
1	Number of qualifications	
2	Effectiveness of qualifications design	
3	Portability of qualifications	
4	Relevance of qualifications	
5	Qualifications uptake and achievement	
6	Integrative approach	
Set 2	<i>The extent to which the delivery of learning programmes addresses the education and training needs of learners and the South African society</i>	
7	Equity of access	
8	Redress practices	
9	Nature of learning programmes	
10	Quality of learning and teaching	
11	Assessment practices	
12	Career and learning pathing	
Set 3	<i>The extent to which quality assurance arrangements enhance the effectiveness of education and training</i>	
13	Number of registered assessors and moderators	
14	Number of accredited providers	
15	Quality assurance practices	
Set 4	<i>The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture</i>	
16	Organisational, economic and societal benefits	
17	Contribution to other national strategies	

4.2.1 Sampling – Cycle 1

As noted above, Cycle 1 piloted the research design and the Impact Indicators. For the pilot, the decision was to utilise a representative sample of the respondents who would be approached in the subsequent cycles. The categories of respondent are indicated in Table 4.3 (SAQA, 2004).

Table 4.3

Sample for the NQF Impact Study – Cycle 1

Category	Type	Number
Providers of education and training (including large, medium and small)	Public institutions	82 individuals through interviews and focus groups
	Private institutions	
Employers	Anglo Platinum	17 individuals through interviews and focus groups
	Edgars	
	Foschini	
	JDG Trading	
	Sasol	
	First National Bank	
	South African Bureau of Standards	
	Eskom	
	Business South Africa South African Breweries	
Organised Labour Organisations	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA)	14 individuals through interviews and focus groups
	South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU)	
	Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	
	South African Metal Workers Union (SAMWU)	
	South African Council for Educators (SACE)	
Government Departments	Department of Education (National and Provincial)	12 individuals through interviews and focus groups
	Department of Labour (National and Provincial)	
Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)	Sector Education and Training Authorities	4 individuals through interviews
Other	South African Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA)	19 individuals through interviews and focus groups
	National Access Consortium of the Western Cape (NACWC)	
	Inter-Ministerial Working Group members	
	SAQA Board members	
	SAQA staff	

4.2.2 Research Instruments – Cycle 1

Data collection for Cycle 1 was undertaken through a range of instruments⁹, including

- A contextualisation interview schedule
- Schedule 1: Provider Interviews
- Schedule 2: Employer Interviews
- Schedule 3: Department of Education /Department of Labour Interviews
- Schedule 3: Focus Groups for Learners
- Schedule 4: Focus Group for Unions

4.2.3 Sampling – Cycle 2

The sampling approach for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study was based on pragmatic considerations (SAQA, 2005, p.17):

The need to develop a research design that would be repeatable was deemed more important than representing all sectors and groupings on *a proportional basis*. It was therefore decided to use purposive quota sampling (emphasis added).

Faced with budgetary constraints and pragmatic considerations, the research team decided on purposive quota sampling, which entailed predetermining categories of respondents and thus determining and filling the quotas of such respondents (Figure 4.4) (SAQA, 2005, p. 9).

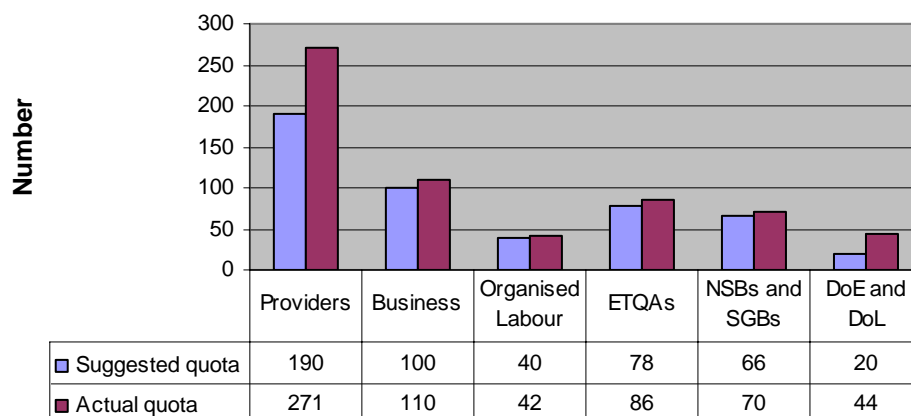


Figure 4.4. Quotas for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study

⁹ See Annexure 6

As in Cycle 1, during Cycle 2 data was collected according to the NQF stakeholder categories as reflected in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Sample of Respondents – NQF Impact Study Cycle 2

Category	Strata	Quota
Providers	General Education and Training (GET), including Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and secondary schools	143
	Further Education and Training (FET) band	79
	Higher Education and Training (HET) band	49
Business	Large	71
	Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMME)	39
Organised labour	Education	10
	Other	32
Quality assurance bodies	Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)	54
	Professional bodies	32
Standards setting bodies	National Standards Bodies (NSBs)	32
	Standards Generation Bodies (SGBs)	38
Government departments	Department of Education (DoE)	26
	Department of Labour (DoL)	18

4.2.4 Research Instruments – Cycle 2

A questionnaire¹⁰ was developed and piloted and adjusted before being sent to potential respondents. In Cycle 2, data collection comprised three components (SAQA, 2005):

- *Stakeholder interviews and focus groups* – 111 interviews and 12 focus groups across all nine South African provinces in the period June to November 2004. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and thereafter analysed. A quantitative analysis was completed on MS Access and Excel. A qualitative analysis was performed with ATLAS.ti using 91 codes¹¹ premised on the 17 Impact Indicators.
- *Analysis of qualifications on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)* – a quantitative summary of qualifications (including unit standards) and learner data on the NLRD as it was available on 31 January 2005. This quantitative summary was supported by a qualitative analysis, performed by an independent expert, of a sample of qualifications on the NLRD. The analysis aimed in particular to investigate the extent to which the current qualifications registered on the NQF addressed the education and training

¹⁰ See Annexure 6

¹¹ See Annexure 5

needs of learners and South African society, chiefly in relation to three of the underpinning principles of the SANQF, namely portability, relevance and redress. The qualitative analysis was limited to regular¹² qualifications in three specific sectors: Physical Planning and Construction; Mining and Minerals; and Hospitality, Travel, Tourism and Gaming.

- *National survey* – an independent research company was contracted to administer a national survey.

However, the purpose of an indicator-based study is to provide (SAQA, 2005, p. 86)

...an *indication* of the main trends in the system and [that] can offer the “big picture” view over time. They do not provide the “fine grain” of practice or point to solutions except in the most general terms.

This study, therefore, undertook a deeper and more detailed analysis of the data collected for the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study, and focused primarily on those aspects that relate to an integrated framework. In the conclusion of the Cycle 2 report, the project team¹³ noted that (SAQA, 2005, p. 87)

[u]nlike 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 a consensus on the direction the NQF should take.

In addition to the data collected for the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study, new empirical data was collected through unstructured interviews with a range of current policy makers in education and training. The purpose of more data collection was to explore whether the perceptions and positions evident through the 2004 data collection are still valid and, possibly, provide more nuanced interpretations of integration, primarily in relation to 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 integrated national qualifications framework?***

¹² ‘Regular’ qualifications refer to qualifications generated through a standards generating body (SGB), as opposed to qualifications submitted for registration on the NQF which were developed by providers of education and training

¹³ Ronel Blom, James Keevy, Ron Tuck and Seamus Needham

4.3 Research Questions

My interest in ‘integration’ or ‘an integrated framework’ for education and training emanated from my direct involvement with the two concluded cycles of the NQF Impact Study. Respondents to both cycles almost overwhelmingly supported the notion of an integrated approach to education and training, as did the respondents to other studies undertaken to review the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF)¹⁴. Yet integration is the one objective of the NQF that is least visible and least operational. Despite this, integration is considered completely central to the idea of the SANQF. The research questions therefore hope to investigate what is behind the notion of an integrated framework and whether, in fact, it is a feasible and appropriate conceptual framework for a national education and training system.

The main overarching research question was therefore formulated as follows:

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?

A number of supporting questions aim to 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 South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) be made meaningful through an integrated framework?*
- *Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?*
- *Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?*

The first of these supporting questions was investigated through the lens of the first two meanings of integration as discussed in the conceptual framework for this study (Chapter 3), as outlined in Table 4.5.

¹⁴ For example, *The Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework* (DoE & DoL, 2002).

Table 4.5

Supporting Research Question 1

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?	
Supporting question	Conceptual framework
Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?	Integration as policy symbolism and the guiding philosophy of the SANQF

The second of the questions relates to the third and fourth meanings of integration in terms of the conceptual framework, as delineated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Supporting Research Question 2

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?	
Supporting questions	Conceptual framework
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

The third question deals with the fifth understanding of integration, as described in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Supporting Research Question 3

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?	
Supporting questions	Conceptual framework
Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?	Integration as policy breadth

The fourth and final supporting question is investigated through the lens of the sixth and seventh meanings associated with integration, as set down in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8**Supporting Research Question 4**

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?	
Supporting questions	Conceptual framework
Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?	Integration as continua of learning Integration as curricular integrability

4.4 Research Design

Cycles 1 and 2 of the NQF Impact Study essentially utilised a mixed method design: quantitative data and qualitative data were collected and were triangulated to develop the findings. Cycle 1 used more qualitative methods (SAQA, 2004, p. 19):

The importance of qualitative measures, especially at the early stages of a longitudinal study, lies in their capacity to make sense of, or to interpret, data and phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. In a complex environment like that of the NQF, different stakeholders will have different perspectives on and understandings of common issues.

However in Cycle 2, a large-scale survey, as a quantitative research instrument, was used in conjunction with structured interviews and focus groups. The different sets of data were triangulated, that is where the quantitative data provided evidence of support for a particular aspect in the survey questionnaire, this was checked against the number of positive comments emerging from the interviews and focus groups. For example, in the survey questionnaire the statement was made that *‘Learners, in particular those learners who were previously excluded, are able to gain access to NQF qualifications’*. Of the survey questionnaire respondents, 79% indicated that they believe ‘access’ has improved (SAQA, 2005, p. 55). The quantitative data was checked against qualitative responses. In this case, the qualitative data supported and confirmed the view that access had improved (SAQA, 2005, p. 55):

On the general question about access to NQF qualifications by previously excluded groups, some respondents identified significant improvements. For example, there had been a huge influx of previously disadvantaged people into the Human Resources (HR) sector:

“The applications for professional registration are practically 80% from previously disadvantaged people...”

Triangulation was used to ensure that the nuances evident through qualitative responses that might be lost through a predefined set of questions such as in a survey questionnaire were given equal prominence (SAQA, 2005). In general, the survey responses and qualitative interviews and focus groups, seen together, supported and enhanced the findings.

This study has undertaken a deeper and more detailed analysis of a selection of the qualitative and quantitative data that relate to integration and the concepts associated with integration, such as portability, progression and articulation, collected through the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study.

The instruments for Cycles 1 and 2 are available in Annexure 6. Table 4.9 presents extracts from the Cycle 1 instruments that particularly relate to *this* inquiry.

Table 4.9

Extracts from Research Instruments for the NQF Impact Study Cycle 1

Cycle 1 Instrument	Question(s)
1 Contextualisation Interview Schedule	3.9) Can the NQF enable an integrated approach to education and training in SA? 3.21) In your opinion, is the NQF currently representing and holding true to the principles outlined in the initial conceptualisation of the NQF?
2 Provider Interview Schedule	1.3 (a) Has the implementation of the NQF facilitated the portability of NQF registered qualifications between institutions? (b) How portable are NQF registered qualifications between streams (vocational/professional and academic)? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> Do qualifications articulate with each other intra- and inter-institutionally? 4.1 Has the implementation of the NQF contributed to a national acceptance of an integrated approach to education and training? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> To what extent is there integration between education and training? Inter-organisational agreements, e.g. between institutions and workplaces How is practical application and experiential learning reflected in curricula and learning programmes?

Table 4.9 (continued)***Extracts from Research Instruments for the NQF Impact Study Cycle 1***

Cycle 1 Instrument	Question(s)
3 Employer Interview Schedule	1.2 How portable are NQF registered qualifications between streams (vocational/professional and academic)? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> Are academic qualifications accepted in the workplace? 4.1 Has the implementation of the NQF contributed to a national acceptance of an integrated approach to education and training? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> Seamless integration Agreements with academic providers and other employers?
4 Department of Education; Department of Labour Interview Schedule	3.3 Please rate the objectives to indicate the progress that has been made with the implementation of each to date? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> Briefly explain each objective 3.8 Can the NQF enable an integrated approach to education and training in SA? <u>Prompts (if required)</u> The focus is on 'approach' – the establishment of a unified approach to education and training
5 Learner Focus Group	3.3 To what extent do your courses combine educational theory with training practice and experience?
6 Union Focus Group	3.3 To what extent do your courses combine educational theory with training practice and experience?

Tables 4.10 and 4.11 show extracts from the Cycle 2 instruments that particularly relate to this enquiry:

Table 4.10***Extracts from the Survey Questionnaire for the NQF Impact Study Cycle 2***

The extent to which qualifications facilitate the mobility of learners (horizontally, vertically, diagonally) within the South African education and training system		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Too soon to say
2.2.2	Learners with NQF qualifications are able to move between vocational, professional and academic streams of the education and training system						
2.2.3	NQF qualifications offered by some institutions are seen to be more portable than NQF qualifications offered by other institutions						
2.2.4	NQF qualifications are seen to be more portable than non-NQF qualifications						
2.2.5	Recognition (credit transfer) is given for incomplete NQF qualifications when learners move from one institution to another						

Table 4.10 (continued)***Extracts from the Survey Questionnaire for the NQF Impact Study Cycle 2***

The extent to which NQF qualifications promote and integrative approach to education and training and the nature of such qualifications							
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Too soon to say
2.5.1	The NQF enables learners to move between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications						
2.5.2	Providers of education and training value each other's qualifications						
2.5.3	The NQF promotes/leads to greater cooperation between the formal education system and the world of work and training						
2.5.4	Educational qualifications and vocational qualifications are viewed as equally important						
2.5.5	Both theory and practice are included in NQF qualifications						
2.5.6	South Africa has adopted a unified approach to education and training						
2.5.7	The integration of education and training has improved career and learning pathing						
The extent to which quality assurance practices enhance the quality of learning, teaching and assessment							
4.1.4	NQF quality assurance ensure that qualifications are based on nationally agreed standards	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Too soon to say
The extent to which the implementation of the NQF supports and contributes to the achievement of national strategies such as the Human Resource Development, National Skills Development Strategy and Tirisano							
5.2.1	The objectives of the NQF are aligned with the objectives of the National Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Too soon to say
5.2.10	NQF qualifications contribute to the achievement of the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) targets	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Too soon to say

Table 4.11***Extracts from the Focus Group Schedules for the NQF Impact Study Cycle 2***

Cycle 2 Instrument	Question(s)
The extent to which NQF qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and the South African society	
Focus Group Schedule: Practitioners	3.) Are NQF qualifications portable across vocational, professional and academic streams? 5.) Are NQF qualifications promoting greater cooperation between education and training agencies? 6.) Do NQF qualifications promote the integration of theory and practice?
Focus Group Schedule: Learners	6.) To what extent can you transfer credits from this institution/provider/learning site to other institutions/providers/learning sites without having to re-do large parts of the qualification? a. All credits are recognised b. Credits are transferred but on a level lower than the exit level of this qualification c. None at all
Focus Group Schedule: Organised Labour	6.) To what extent can you transfer credits from this institution/provider/learning site to other institutions/providers/learning sites without having to re-do large parts of the qualification? d. All credits are recognised e. Credits are transferred but on a level lower than the exit level of this qualification f. None at all

The Cycle 2 instruments were piloted with 15 individuals and experts who were also involved in the Cycle 1 data collection, and refined before being administered (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12***Panel for the Review of the Cycle 2 Questionnaire Survey***

Name	Organisation
Melissa King	Independent Examinations Board (IEB)
Mamsie Sebolai	Association of Private Providers of Education and Training (APPETD)
Rachel Prinsloo	Technikon Southern Africa (TSA)
Kathy Munro	University of the Witwatersrand
Dorette van Ede	University of South Africa (UNISA)
Anthea Saffy	Human Resources: AMPLATS
Rob van der Schyff	Human Resources: South African Breweries
Inge Dougans	Vacuflex (SMME provider)
Gerard Smith	ETQA Manager: Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA)
Maire Kelly	Organising Field 09: SAQA staff
Erik Hallendorf	Assessment Standards Generation Body (SGB)
Tommy Baloyi	South African Council for Educators (SACE)
Bennie Anderson	Human Resources: First National Bank
Karlien Murray	Professional Accreditation Body

4.5 Sampling and Data Collection

The sampling for Cycle 1 was representative of the stakeholder groupings that were to be approached in Cycle 2 and subsequent cycles, but the numbers were quite small, as this was a pilot study (see Background to the study). For this study, the full sample of Cycle 1, in relation to the selected questions (see Table 4.10), was utilised for the analysis.

The sampling for Cycle 2 was much larger, utilising a purposive quota sampling approach (see Background to the study). This means that while the data that was collected according to stakeholder categories ‘would be sufficient to determine the impact of the NQF...it was accepted that although generalisations across the population as a whole would be possible, strata-specific generalisations would be inappropriate’ (SAQA, 2005, p. 17)¹⁵. This has implications for the analysis for this inquiry, particularly as the analysis was undertaken specifically of only 77 survey questionnaires (out of 623 questionnaires) and 111 interviews and 12 focus groups. The reason for this data sample was that it made it possible to link the quantitative and qualitative data directly, in keeping with a mixed method design. This is because the survey questionnaires were either completed before, during or after an interview with the respondent. The interviews enhanced the respondents’ understanding of the research instrument and provided supporting comments to the survey questions. The sample for the analyses is presented in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13

Sample for Further Analysis of Cycle 2 Data

Stakeholder category	Number
Providers of education and training	26
Employers	27
Department of Education and Department of Labour (National and provincial)	15
Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)	6
Organised Labour organisations	3
Total	77

The 77 responses to the survey questionnaire were compared with the whole population for Cycle 2 in relation to the selected questions in order to check whether

¹⁵ However, I will look at some of these categories and determine the extent to which the different stakeholder groupings differ in their responses to the questionnaire questions investigated for this inquiry

the smaller sample responses correlate with the larger sample. This was found to be the case (refer to Annexure 2) (Figure 4.5).

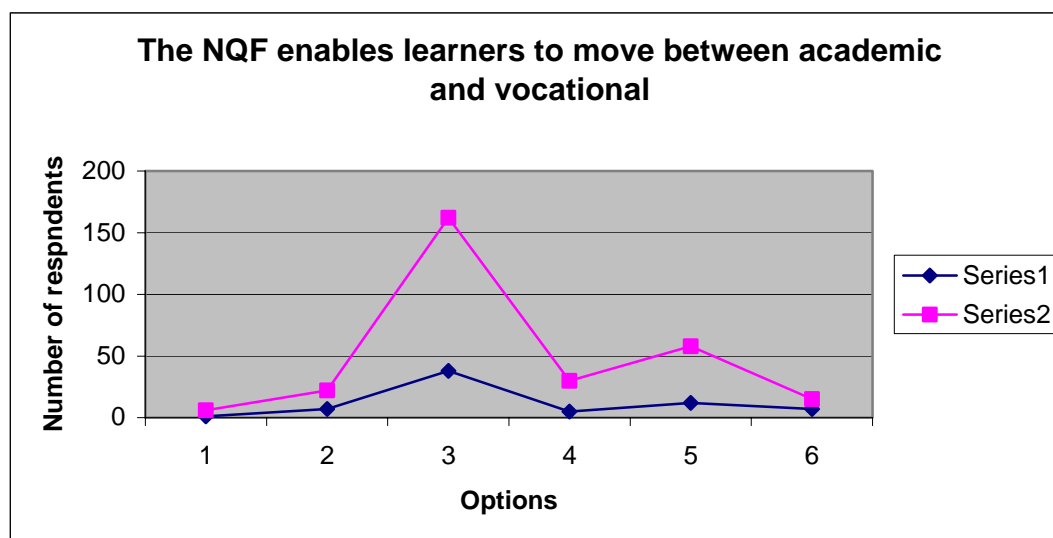


Figure 4.5. The Correlation of Responses between the Small and Large sample for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study

- Key:**
- Series 1: 70/77 survey questionnaire responses
 - Series 2: 293/623 survey questionnaire responses
 - Option 1: Strongly disagree
 - Option 2: Disagree
 - Option 3: Agree
 - Option 4: Strongly agree
 - Option 5: Don't know
 - Option 6: Too soon to say

The sampling for the additional empirical data – the unstructured interviews – was a combination of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling was used when an opportunity arose to interview six members of the SAQA Board in May and June 2006. All the respondents are individuals who are intimately involved with the development and implementation of the SANQF (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Sample for Additional Semi-structured Interviews

	Name	Organisation/Stakeholder representation
1	M van Rooyen	SAQA Board member, representing the Association of Private Providers of Education and Training (APPETD) and chairperson of the Education and Training Quality Assurance committee of the Authority
2	K Hall	SAQA Board member, representing Business South Africa (BUSA) and acting Chairperson of the Board

Table 4.14 (Continued).*Sample for Additional Semi-structured Interviews*

	Name	Organisation/Stakeholder representation
3	S Muller	SAQA Board member, representing the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and chairperson of the Qualifications and Standards committee of the Authority
4	A Paterson	SAQA Board member, representing the Department of Science and Technology (DST)
5	S Isaacs	SAQA Executive Officer
6	S Badat	SAQA Board member, and Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education (CHE)

4.6 Additional Data Sources

Over and above the data collected through sets of interviews, focus groups and the large-scale survey, and the additional unstructured interviews, a number of other data sources were utilised for this study. These included qualitative analyses for Cycle 1 and 2 of a sample of qualifications registered on the NQF; public inputs and responses to three documents¹⁶ published by the Department of Education and the Department of Labour dealing with the review and recommendations for an improved SANQF, (see Chapter 2, Literature Review) and a number of internal SAQA discussion documents.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted utilising the key elements of the conceptual framework (see Chapter 3) as a set of themes and codes and sub-codes. These are:

- Integration as policy symbolism
- Integration as the guiding philosophy for the framework
- Integration as the scope of the framework
- Integration as the architecture of the framework
- Integration as policy breadth
- Integration as a continuum of learning
- Integration as curricular integrability

¹⁶ *The 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); *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework. Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education, 2004)

The themes and codes correspond with the Research Questions (Figure 4.6). (Refer to Annexure 1 for the full list of themes, codes and sub-codes.)

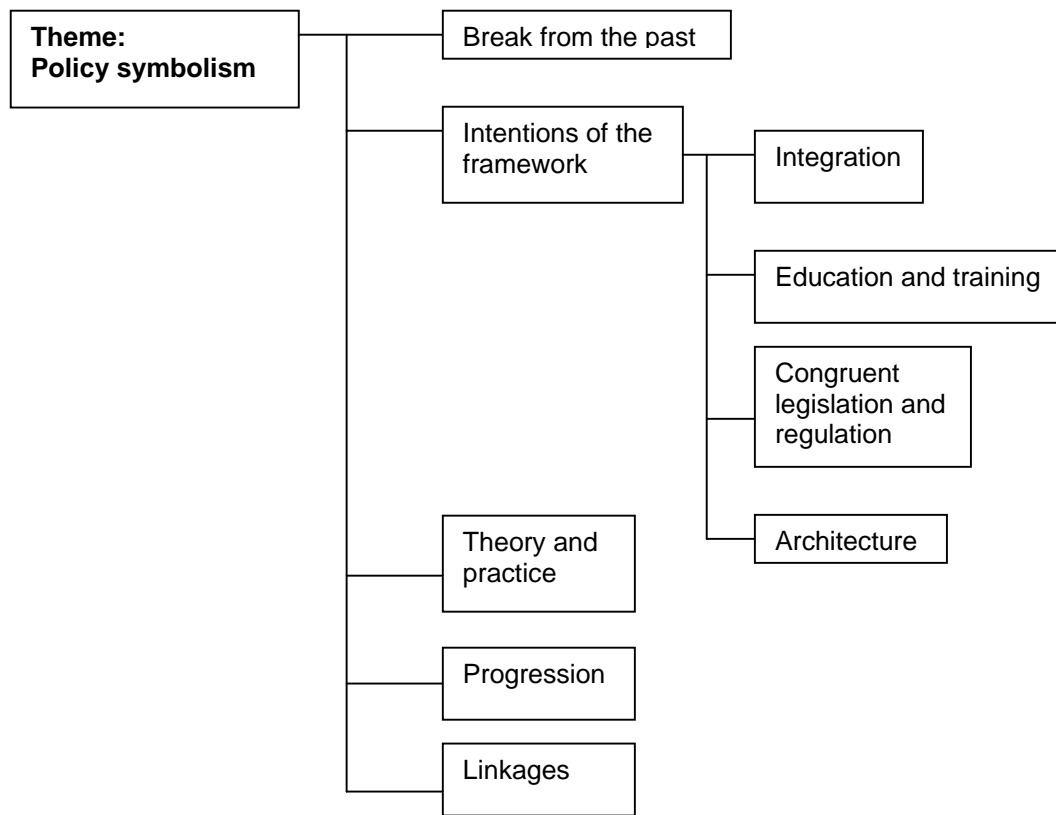


Figure 4.6. The Development of Themes, Codes and Sub-codes for Research Question 1

The same themes, codes and sub-codes were used, first to group emerging evidence and then to analyse the qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data for the questions in the survey questionnaire, for example, is grouped in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

The Relationship between Codes and Survey Questionnaire Questions

Theme: Guiding philosophy of the SANQF		
Codes	Sub-codes	Question
Conceptual framework for the education and training system	Mobility and articulation	Question 2.2.2 Learners with NQF qualifications are able to move between vocational, professional and academic streams of the education and training system.
	Portability	Question 2.2.3 NQF qualifications offered by some institutions are seen as more portable than NQF qualifications offered by other institutions.
		Question 2.2.5 Recognition (credit transfer) is given for incomplete NQF qualifications when learners move from one institution to another.
	Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic/vocational • Education/training 	Question 2.5.1 The NQF enables learners to move between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications.
Parity of esteem		Question 2.5.5 Both theory and practice are included in NQF qualifications.
	Value all learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions • Qualifications • Academic/vocational 	Question 2.2.4 NQF qualifications are seen as more portable than non NQF-qualifications.
		Question 2.5.2 Providers of education and training value each other's qualifications.
		Question 2.5.4 Education qualifications and vocational qualifications are viewed as equally important.

Similarly, the qualitative analysis of a sample of regular qualifications registered on the NQF was analysed using the same themes, codes and sub-codes (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16

The Relationship between Codes and the Qualitative Analysis of a Sample of Regular Qualifications (Annexure 3)

Theme: Architecture		
Codes	Sub-codes	Sample Analysis
Portability	Structure of the qualification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transferability 	Very few of the qualifications analysed (4 of the 15 high-scoring qualifications, i.e. those which were most likely to contain statements on portability and transferability) provided any specific detail...in the main qualifications either did not address the issue at all, made some token effort at addressing portability and transferability (often by including or paraphrasing the relevant sections from the SAQA Act) or misinterpreted the meaning...

Further, the qualitative analysis of public comments about the SANQF review documents and SAQA internal discussion documents was treated in a similar manner (Table 4.17).

Table 4. 17

The Relationship between Codes and the Qualitative Analysis of a Sample of Public Comments on SANQF Review Documents (Annexure 4)

Theme: Policy breadth		
Codes	Sub-codes	Sample Analysis
Establishment of trust	Collaboration of sub-structures	The inability of all key players to enact memoranda of understanding and create a free flow of information and funding between SETAs has seriously hampered the establishment and implementation of cross-sectoral learnerships. An additional learning path and uncertain new roles for quality assurance bodies might create new conflicts to thwart the achievement of learnership targets.

4.8 Validity and Reliability

In this study, the validity and reliability of the research were dealt with in a number of ways, most of which relate to the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study conducted on behalf of SAQA. The development of the research design and Impact Indicators, for example, was subject to a number of rigorous processes involving participants from within SAQA (including the project team), the governance structures of the Authority, and a range of experts and respondents from the education and training sectors. The

conceptualisation of the study included the requirement that, as a longitudinal, comparative study, it was necessary for future applications of the Impact Study that the research design could be carried out by agencies other than SAQA, should that be appropriate (SAQA, 2004, p. 8). This meant that all decisions and actions had to be documented carefully, and that these had to be supported by a replicable approach to data collection, analyses and interpretation (Merriam, 1998, p. 166) for the studies to enable comparative analyses over time.

These two studies can thus claim that they have made use of an ‘audit trail’ (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128) to ensure validity. In addition, extensive triangulation (Merriam, 1998, p. 168) was utilised. Further, owing to the longitudinal nature of the two studies, the extensive exposure to the research sites supported validity and reliability. Through ‘thick, rich description’ (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 128), the credibility of the studies is supported. Also, ‘peer debriefing’ (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 129) was an integral part of the studies. At least three groups interrogated the studies at the different phases of conceptualisation, development and analysis, namely the Working Group, the Advisory Group and members of the SAQA Board¹⁷.

In addition, and this is important in terms of the deeper analysis of the data collected through Cycle 1 and 2 of the NQF Impact Study, the ‘investigator’s position’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 172), is clarified (see 4.1 Investigator’s position).

4.9 The relationship between the Research Questions and the Findings Chapters

The Research Questions for this inquiry are addressed in the following findings chapters:

¹⁷ Annexure 7

Table 4.18***The Relationship between the Research Questions and the Findings Chapters***

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>	<i>Findings chapter</i>
Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?	Integration as political symbolism and the guiding philosophy of the SANQF	Chapter 5
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	Chapter 6
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	Chapter 7
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?	An integrated framework	Chapter 8

In Chapter 5 the extent to which an integrated framework as an example of policy symbolism has become the guiding philosophy for the implementation of the SANQF, is addressed. Research Question 1 is dealt with in that chapter.

Scope, architecture and policy breadth address the structural and technical arrangements, that is the ‘intrinsic logic’ of a qualifications framework, as well as the communities of practice that are enabled through the ‘institutional logic’ (Howieson and Raffe, 1999) of an education and training system. Research Questions 2 and 3 are dealt with in Chapter 6.

Chapter 7 argues that, while distinct epistemologies are important in an education and training system, in curricula there is an increased convergence of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, which may have particular implications for an integrated framework. Research Question 4 is addressed in this chapter.

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 integrated national qualifications framework?* is revisited in the conclusions chapter, drawing together the arguments of all the preceding chapters (Chapter 8).

CHAPTER 5
INTEGRATION AS SOCIAL JUSTICE:
POLICY SYMBOLISM AND A GUIDING PHILOSOPHY

One needs to remember that when you tamper with the NQF you are tampering with the aspirations of the people of South Africa – we are a fledgling democracy and therefore require a system that inculcates the associated value system.¹

This chapter presents the results of the first supporting research question for this study, namely Is the objective of an integrated South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) an example of policy symbolism? The two main themes are ‘policy symbolism’ and ‘the guiding philosophy for the SANQF’, representing the strong social justice rationale for the development and implementation of an integrated national qualifications framework. The new African National Congress government’s attempt to make a clean break from a past unjust and inequitable education and training system is reflected in the need for powerful symbols that will signal a new beginning. An integrated SANQF is such a symbol. The discussion of ‘policy symbolism’ is based on three data sources: interviews with board members of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), a set of interviews undertaken for Cycle 1 and 2 of the National Qualifications Framework Impact Study², and responses from a wide range of NQF stakeholders to ‘An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document’³.

The ‘guiding philosophy for the SANQF’ reflects the systemic attempts to embody the symbolism of the SANQF. ‘A guiding philosophy’ uses the same data sources, but is also supported by a quantitative analysis of questions relating to this particular aspect of the study.

In the introduction (5.1), the relationship between the research question and the conceptual framework is shown. The SANQF, as a symbol of the break from the apartheid legacy of education and training, is discussed in 5.2. In 5.3, the discussion explores integration as the guiding philosophy of the emerging education and training system. In 5.4 the chapter is concluded with a summary of the findings in relation to this lens on an integrated framework.

¹ The South African Democratic Teachers’ Union’s (SADTU), Annexure 4.

² SAQA, 2004 and SAQA, 2005.

³ Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Labour (DoL), 2003.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the extent to which an integrated national qualifications framework is a policy symbol for a new education and training system in South Africa, and the extent to which the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) came into being as a result of an unjust and inequitable system under apartheid. The social justice issues, which led to the conceptualisation of the SANQF as an integrated national qualifications framework, have become embodied in new powerful symbols and underpin the philosophy for the emerging education and training system in this country. The symbolism of the policy therefore seems to inform systemic attempts to develop an integrated framework, which is discussed under ‘guiding philosophy’ in this chapter. Further, throughout this study it will become evident that the different lenses on integration (refer to Chapter 3) are inextricably linked and that the passion for an integrated SANQF can be understood as the meshing of ideology and attempts to develop pragmatic approaches that will reflect such an ideology. In addition, the concomitant problems associated with the confluence of ideology and practical solutions, becomes evident. Table 5.1 portrays the relationship between Research Question 1 and the first two of the conceptual lenses on integration namely policy symbolism and a guiding philosophy.

Table 5.1

The Relationship between Research Question 1 and the 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?	
Supporting question	Conceptual framework
Is the objective of an integrated SANQF an example of policy symbolism?	Integration as policy symbolism and the guiding philosophy of the SANQF

This chapter will thus attempt to show that an integrated SANQF, as a symbol of the break from the past, has profoundly influenced the way in which the qualifications framework has been structured.

The data upon which these findings are based emerged from the following four sources (refer to Chapter 4 – Sampling):

- Unstructured interviews

- Contextualisation interviews conducted for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study
- The questionnaire survey for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study, and the interviews that followed on the questionnaire
- Public comments on '*An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System. Consultative Document*' (DoE & DoL, 2003)

Unstructured interviews were conducted with six board members of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The questions put to the members were *What do you understand by an integrated framework?* (and/or) *What do you understand by 'integration'?* (Annexure 1). In addition, responses to the 'contextualisation' interviews for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study, were analysed (Annexure 1). The questions relevant to this chapter from these interviews included 3.9) *Can the NQF enable an integrated approach to education and training in South Africa?* 3.21) *In your opinion, is the NQF currently representing and holding true to the principles outlined in the initial conceptualisation of the NQF?* A number of 'Provider' and 'Employer' interviews for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study also produced valuable data. (Annexure 1). The question posed to these categories of respondents is 4.1) *Has the implementation of the NQF contributed to a national acceptance of an integrated approach to education and training?* Further, Department of Education and Department of Labour (Annexure 1) respondents for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study were asked 3.8) *Can the NQF enable an integrated approach to education and training in South Africa?* In addition, responses to the survey questionnaire for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study and the interviews that followed these quantitative responses included responses to statements such as (Annexure 2 and 1):

2.2.3) *NQF qualifications offered by some institutions are seen to be more portable than NQF qualifications offered by other institutions.*

2.5.1) *The NQF enables learners to move between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications.*

2.5.2) *Providers of education and training value each other's qualifications.*

2.5.4) *Educational qualifications and vocational qualifications are viewed as equally important.*

Finally, the responses to the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) from a wide range of stakeholders provided the final data source for this chapter. These responses were particularly interesting as they were ‘spontaneous’ reactions, that is sector responses, in relation to proposals made in the consultation document (DoE & DoL, 2003), which were perceived to drastically move away from the guiding philosophy of the South African National Qualification Framework (SANQF). These responses are available in Annexure 4.

5.1.1 *Emerging Themes*

The emerging themes from the data confirm the fact that the new education and training system for South Africa would have a strong socio-political flavour in its conceptualisation and development. The first and most obvious theme discussed under ‘policy symbolism’ is the resistance and reaction to apartheid education and training rooted in, and influenced by the notion of a broadly based ‘People’s Education’ inspired by diverse influences such as Paulo Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ (Kraak, 1998). The second theme sees the emergence of the idea that an education and training system should be ‘socially inclusive’, that is, it should afford equal esteem and respect to learners and learning and remove unnecessary barriers to education. The SANQF as a ‘social construct’ is the third theme, encompassing the particular social purpose of the South African system, including a ‘transformation agenda’ dealing with the social uses and value of learning. In theme four, the frustrations with the lack of progress in relation to the implementation of an integrated framework become evident.

As noted in the introduction, the symbolism of a new system became embodied in the guiding philosophy of an integrated framework. In the two themes that emerge under the discussion of ‘integration as guiding philosophy for the SANQF’, ‘integration as a meta-theme’ and ‘parity of esteem’ seem to be attempts to ‘make integration practical’ (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 18). These themes indicate a move beyond policy symbolism to a guiding philosophy that has begun to permeate all thinking about South Africa’s education and training system.

5.2 Policy Symbolism

The SANQF, at its inception, was ‘primarily a political movement which viewed the school classroom as a central site of the struggle against Apartheid’ (Kraak, 1998, p. 1) with an emerging pedagogy that aimed to provide an alternative to that of ‘Bantu Education’, perceived to be the mainstay of the apartheid regime’s policies. The political movement demanded ‘a single non-racial national system of [Education and Training], and the dilution of the deep historical divisions between mental and manual labour, and between education and training’ (Kraak, 1998, p. 2). The SANQF thus came to represent a powerful symbol of the break with the past, particularly in representing resistance to apartheid education.

5.2.1 *Resistance and Reaction to Apartheid Education*

An integrated approach came to represent a drastic alternative to the old system. A respondent to Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study expressed the view that:

[p]rior to the advent of the NQF there was no sign of education and training system, there was darkness in a sense. Now people believe there is education. It is an important achievement to have such a symbolic coming together of minds. We might disagree about the mechanisms that are put in place but in terms [of] symbolism there is change (Senior Department of Education official, Annexure 1, p. 7).

The deeply felt passion for a new, equitable education and training system seems to be unlike anything else in the world. Granville (2004, p. 3) comments ‘[t]he stakes set by the South African project and the passions and emotions displayed by both its proponents and its critics are much higher than most equivalent discourses in other jurisdictions’.

In its response to the substantial changes to the SANQF, in particular in relation to integration, proposed by *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document*, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) (Annexure 4, p. 8) maintained that ‘if we now begin to establish a new NQF [i.e. not integrated] we are detracting from the mandate of the people of this country and revisiting a past we best leave behind’.

An explanation for the almost blind commitment to the new education and training system seems to be the ideology that underlies the development of such a system:

...[P]erhaps in the heady days of People's Education and People's Power ... we dissolved complex binaries too easily. The People's Education and People's Power part of it and the education and training part of it. And I think that was at a point where we were highly optimistic and we thought that we will ... really show the world... (Executive Officer, Council on Higher Education (CHE), Annexure 1, p. 9).

In addition, the fact that the new education and training system was the result of a political settlement, still carries much weight:

We need to remind the role players in the task team that the National Qualifications [Framework] is the product of hard, serious and difficult negotiations amongst the strong positioned nationalists and democrats. It further emanated from the alliance's strong engagements with the opposition [to] change at the time and as such must be respected (Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Annexure 4, p. 2).

Further, the SANQF was seen as an important part of the struggle for 'national liberation' (South African Communist Party (SACP), Annexure 4, p. 2) and is still seen as the most appropriate means to achieve the objectives of the SANQF:

The CHE and the HEQC are and remain committed to an integrated approach to education and training as an important inheritance of the national democratic struggle of the pre-1994 period and as the most appropriate means to achieve the goals of the NQF: namely an education and training *system* characterised by equity of access, opportunity and outcomes; high quality provision, learning and teaching; learner mobility and progression; and, articulation between programmes, qualifications and institutions (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 3).

While acknowledging that the idea of an integrated framework was rooted in a particular ideology, one interviewee felt that this strong ideological position is the correct starting point:

I still want to argue 20 years later that this is the correct starting point. I don't accept affordability, for example, as the correct starting point. I believe that your goals, principles and values...including the context within which you pursue these things are what shape [the system] (Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 10).

Thus, the integrated framework has as its intention to enhance access, redress, equity and quality:

...[W]e want to get the majority of our people that were marginalized by the system, and are outside of the formal education system, out of no fault of their own, who have accumulated skills and experience in the workplaces and in the communities. We will provide them with access back into [the] education system and provide them with opportunities for them to progress

from a sweeper to an engineer (National Department of Education official, Annexure 1, p. 7).

An integrated framework therefore, has to overcome the historical prejudices against manual and practical learning and work:

There is much historic prejudice against practical skills and craft knowledge and much elitism surrounding subjects and disciplines. Both forms of prejudice have origins in the class structure of capitalist societies and both need to be criticised (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 33).

The SANQF was thus vested with the responsibility of being not only symbolic of the new order, but ‘an instrument for human dignity and human rights’ (French, 2005, p. 54).

5.2.2 *Social Inclusion*

A logical progression from the idea of the SANQF as an instrument for human dignity is the notion of social inclusion. Parker (2006, p. 35) suggests that the main difference between the SANQF and other national qualifications frameworks elsewhere in the world is the strong ‘normative orientation’ of the system. This provides another clue for the symbolic value of the SANQF:

It would be naïve to believe that one can construct an inclusive NQF in a society fractured by exclusions, or, to recall the language of the liberation struggle, to have normal education in an abnormal society. Education and training and by implication the construction of an NQF are part and parcel of making a democratic South Africa and face challenges similar to those prevalent in the broader society.

An integrated framework therefore also has the task to enhance social inclusion. The SANQF has to enable people to access education and training because ‘there was a whole lot of people that were left out and that is no longer acceptable in society’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 11). The South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (Annexure 4, p. 3) agrees, and argues that ‘[t]he inclusion of social partners was an attempt to further the interests of the broader civil society and negate the elitism and non-inclusive approach that characterised the education and training system under apartheid’. This is also given as the rationale for the stakeholder approach to standards and qualifications development promoted by the SAQA. Thus, not only should previously excluded people enjoy greater access to education and training but the standards setters and qualification developers should reflect the macro civil society, which under the previous dispensation were kept out of decisions about education and training policy:

It is our view that stakeholder engagement is the way to go as this process is political. Political in that it is a transformation process of the apartheid education and training system characterised by social strata silos (COSATU, Annexure 4, p. 3).

Social inclusion is expressed, in particular, through the idea of equal esteem and respect. A number of respondents commented that an integrated framework was conceived to give recognition for the value of individuals' contribution to society and that the framework was meant to articulate such value:

We have a kind of conception of equality, which is "sameness", right? Whereas the equity conception, which is about fair and just treatment, is about recognising the worth of each human being and individual and his or her contribution to the economy and society...(Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 14).

Integration then becomes a means whereby 'equivalent status' is made possible (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 15):

...[T]he only thing that was an objective of the NQF [was] to give equal status and recognition to vocational studies on the same level as academic studies... The status being a recognition of ability, of authority, of responsibility... a person who looks after a multi-million rand power station, to be recognised as worthwhile.

It therefore seems that the integrated framework intended to enhance social esteem. Mehl (2004, p. 22) says that it is this recognition, namely the status, that is awarded by society for learning achievements, which raises the esteem and respect for individuals:

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.

Integration thus was not meant to 'make all things equal', but to 'establish peers' and accord 'equal respect' (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 9) because

...our economy is held up by people who don't have these fancy qualifications but they are able to run our factories, run our banks, they are able to do a whole lot of things that are valuable to our society and somehow we are not recognising that (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 11).

It is thus becoming increasingly evident that the SANQF 'was seen as a mechanism to acknowledge in no small measure the workers' contribution to the struggle for freedom' (Heyns and Needham, 2004, p. 33). The apartheid legacy, in particular the lack of opportunities and the non-recognition for learning attained in contexts outside of formal

education that was largely inaccessible to a large proportion of the population, resulted in an attempt to overcome the ‘impermeable barriers’ (CHE, Appendix 4, p. 3) to improve the life chances of an individual:

...I[I]n South Africa, we are trying very hard to deal with ... the issue of the integration of people, you know, the bigger project, where you are saying that the reason why you are bringing people together ...is also about systemic transformation, where you are trying to break down other barriers, where most of your semi-skilled workers were black...(Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 11).

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), in its response to the *Consultative Document* made it clear that an integrated framework approach is already making inroads into the barriers that existed in the past (HPCSA, Annexure 4, p. 4):

It is beyond any question that the institution of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has ushered in a viable and sustainable educational, training and development dispensation. This dispensation has indeed begun challenging the traditional notions of education, training and development in a way that seeks to break down the artificial barriers caused by inflexible and narrow focus...

Likewise, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), responding to the same consultation document, is of the opinion that the recommendations to ‘dis-integrate’ the SANQF by creating three quite different pathways, will (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 32)

...lead to the perpetuation of inequalities, and impermeable boundaries between what will be perceived to be superior “educational” institution based qualifications, and what will be perceived to be inferior “training” workplace based qualifications.

Further, they believe that ‘dis-integration’ will lead to a ‘dumbing down’ of workplace learning and reduce the possibilities of access and articulation with other components of education and training (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 2).

This translates into life opportunities for individuals, that is in terms of the choices that are made available and the ease with which people can ‘cross learning pathways’ (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 10). A SAQA Board Member maintains that ‘an integrated framework is important, but not for creating equalness, but for giving people routes to the top...’ (Annexure 1, p. 11). Another SAQA Board Member agrees, and says that integration is ‘the goal that every person, every citizen in the society can move to the highest level, should they so wish, [and that they] can do that with the minimum of impediments – that

is integration’ (Annexure 1, p. 11). The notion of not being locked into a particular pathway is closely associated with an integrated framework: ‘so, you don’t get the situation that if you did not go into a particular stream, that your life chances are drastically affected forever’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 25). The notion of choice, of freedom, and ease of movement within the education and training sphere and equal esteem is thus still strongly supported, for example (SADTU, Annexure 4, p. 6):

The initial purpose of the NQF was to integrate education and training giving both, Labour and Education, equal weighting...Many argue the new proposed system takes us back to the apartheid years where learning on the shop floor was considered inferior and out of the realm of Higher Education. In addition, those progressing through the Higher Education pathways are usually advantaged, with better resources and guaranteed better life opportunities – the NQF was intended to break this elitist status quo that was perpetuated by the apartheid regime in order to create a cheap and poorly skilled black labour force.

To conclude, interviewees and respondents, maintain that ‘[n]o one disagrees that the integrated approach is more difficult to achieve. Its benefits however, for our society are greater than any that our past system has provided’ (Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (INSETA), Annexure 4, p. 5).

5.2.3 *A Social Construct*

Yet another explanation for the symbolic importance of an integrated framework is the notion that the SANQF is considered a ‘social construct’. A social construct ‘is constructed and sustained by mutual agreement between people’ (Metcalf, 2006, p. 1). In the African National Congress’ (ANC) *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (1995, pp. – 9), the SANQF as a social construct emerges:

- In democratic systems of government, policies must be arrived at through open social and political processes which involve all major stakeholders and interest groups, and which citizens feel free to influence...[they] can only succeed if the affected organs of civil society feel that they are partners with a stake in the outcome.
- For a policy to have a chance of success, a sufficient number of people must be persuaded that it is right, necessary and implementable. Almost any education and training policy will come to grief in practice if it does not win the support of two essential constituencies: those who are expected to benefit from it, and those who are expected to implement it.
- It follows that flexible and adaptable policies are likely to be the most successful. Rigid and dogmatic policies will be brittle and easily broken.

Metcalf (2006, p. 5) argues that

[t]he NQF was a construct of social forces operating to achieve a set of social, economic and political goals at a particular historical moment. It was borne of hopes for an education which would empower a populace denied access to education under apartheid for full participation economically and socially.

It is therefore small wonder that the social construct that is the education and training system is so vehemently defended, for at least three reasons: civil society considers itself as a partner in the conceptualisation and development of the SANQF; enough people have been persuaded that it is right, necessary and implementable; and the intended beneficiaries are still holding out for the hope and aspirations the new system holds for them:

The NQF was purported to be a social construct that embodied the aspirations of all the people of South Africa, especially those disadvantaged and deprived by our legacy of apartheid (SADTU, Annexure 4, p. 7).

The first of these three reasons is particularly important for the cherished notion of the SANQF as a social construct. Jansen (2001, p. 42), for example, argues that '[u]ntil 1990, the production of education policy in South Africa was a relatively simple matter. The state maintained control of education policy in ways that were bureaucratically centralised, racially exclusive and politically authoritarian'. Perhaps policy development, so soon after the demise of apartheid, is still too closely associated with liberation, for roleplayers to give up their sense of contribution to a new education and training system and hence, the defence.

In addition, the SANQF is also closely associated with the social purposes it was intended to achieve, for example (SACP, Annexure 4, p. 20), 'It is essential that the country maintain one framework of qualifications, and that the commitment to equity and redress be affirmed'.

In the analysis of the purposes of national qualifications frameworks (see Chapter 2: Literature Review), it is evident that the SANQF is the only qualifications framework that is overtly 'transformative'. SADTU, in its response to the *Consultative Document*, therefore suggests that the proposals in this consultation document should be viewed against the transformative purposes of the SANQF:

...[T]he response by the two Ministries on the Interdependent Consultative Document clearly indicates a radical shift from [the] integration project. In fact, what has occurred [that] the creation of a new NQF system that has detracted from our transformation agenda by making proposals that fundamentally change the NQF?

Thus, unlike other national qualification frameworks, the SANQF has a particular social purpose (Parker, 2006, p. 34 - 35):

Whereas the development of many other NQFs, especially those in the developed world, has been accretive, administrative and technical in an attempt to “co-ordinate” what already exists, South Africa’s NQF has a strongly normative orientation; what is (apartheid education) must be transformed into what ought to be.

This is in keeping with the idea that the SANQF is part of a broader social transformation (Parker, 2006) and thus is also vested with the responsibility to effect changes to the social uses and value of qualifications. It seems, then, that an integrated NQF intends to attach societal value to particular roles filled by people from different backgrounds, and to recognise the value such people have for society:

...[Y]ou almost had the kind of builders and the bridge builders...[who] have always had this different kind of value in society, so you do get these kinds of comparisons [between the two types of builders], and the comparisons also make it important that we in fact start to value different kinds of learning...I wouldn’t say equally, but we have to value different kinds of learning appropriately, so that it is not seen as *de facto* inferior...(Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 12).

The different societal roles and the values attached to such roles are seen to be legitimate and equally valuable (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 12):

You’re a degreed person, I am a technikon-based person. Your academic thinking...is totally different from technikon-based learning, and it has to be, because we have different roles: when I go into a problem, I’m thinking solutions, when you go into a problem, you’re thinking concepts...you see what I mean? There are different roles, different roles in society.

The point, it seems, is that there is an acknowledgement of ‘difference’, but a resistance to ‘different’ equating to ‘better’ or ‘worse’: ‘So, certain engineers actually deal with conceptual design issues and others deal with other issues and they really constitute a team. Now, does that make one person better? Now, that is where our issue comes in’ (Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 50).

5.2.4 *Lack of Progress in relation to an Integrated Framework*

In the SAQA *NQF Impact Study, Cycle 2* (2005), the research team notes that the South African system has not yet sufficiently clarified the integrative intentions of the SANQF. This is in keeping with the comment that ‘conceptual adequacy of the planned reforms’ (Jansen, 2002, p. 2) has not been achieved. Jansen, (2001, p. 49) maintains that

...unless policy evaluation in South Africa provides greater weight to the symbolic functions of education policy, then there is the real danger of social expectations being frustrated and theoretical progress being undermined in explaining education transition after apartheid.

Evidence from the data that frustrations are indeed surfacing, is emerging:

There is no sustainability, no progression, no growth. In that regard we have failed big time, we have betrayed the masses of people. We have had 5 years to implement it, but all we are getting is an increase in the number of the young being unemployed and destitute...it means that there is something we are not doing right (National Department of Education official, Annexure 1, p. 10).

Almost overwhelmingly the blame is placed on the two departments responsible for the implementation of the SANQF. At a macro level, integration is still very much a conceptual and contentious issue. This seems to constrain integration at other levels. A private Further Education and Training (FET) college suggested: ‘I don’t think there is any interaction between education and training and it starts with the two ministers that don’t talk to one another’ (Annexure 1, p. 13). The National Professional Teachers’ Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) (2004, p. 1), in its response to the draft *Higher Education Qualifications Framework*⁴, another document published by the Ministry of Education, agrees and puts it even more forcefully:

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 interest (along the DoE/DoL, education/training, academic/vocational divide) at the cost of integration across education and training and across formal, non-formal education and training opportunities.

Education and training institutions, therefore, are feeling constrained by the seemingly different political agendas:

...[T]he ministers, the departments...they seem to have different agendas...the education department say education is for education, but the Department of Labour is saying education is for skills development and those

⁴ Ministry of Education, 2004.

two need to match. The vocational and the general must be married and they must produce offspring that will make our country more full in terms of our skills, and I just wish they would get into bed together. It's not happening (FET college, Annexure 1, p. 13).

Other commentators (such as Jansen (2004) and French (2005)) argue that a 'divided ownership' (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 23) of the SANQF has compromised the ideal of an integrated framework from the outset. Given the socio-political birth of a new education and training system for South Africa, the political impasse is real and important. French (2005, p. 56) comments that in the conceptualisation of the SANQF, it was envisaged that the 'full majesty of the state' was needed:

It is important to remember the assumptions made about the new order in the formative years of the NQF. Firstly, there was the conviction that there would be a single Ministry and Department of Lifelong Learning after 1994. This would 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. Secondly, it was assumed that a new Minister of Lifelong Learning would stand behind the NQF, seeing it as the cornerstone of transformation, with conviction and a clear perception of its role.

Instead, the legacy of two departments was maintained. (Why this happened is still obscure and subject to speculation.)

On the one hand, the reason for the current impasse seems to be that 'integration is too difficult', so it is used as a 'device' to prevent further conceptualisation (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 19). On the other hand, the lack of political will is blamed: 'There isn't a political will, which says that this is the way it is going to be – now make it work. And if there isn't that, and the personalities are clashing, then we have a problem' (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 20).

SADTU (Annexure 4, p. 8) agrees and says that strong political commitment is needed:

It is clear that the decision on the NQF requires strong political commitment that is based on the aspirations of the people of this country and that it would be ironic if the NQF is dismantled as a response to the personalities of two ministers. Surely the future of this country's potential to heal itself, empower itself and become a key player in the global arena must transcend the tensions and turf contestations of two individuals.

The political heads of the two departments are thus finding themselves in a very difficult position. It seems that it would almost be political suicide if an integrated framework is discredited:

...[T]hey can't be openly critical of something that is obviously in the interest of the country as a whole and so, you get always, this preamble with this huge buy-in to the objectives and then everything from the body of the article or the paper goes on to split [the SANQF] up. In addition to that, although they have supported it, at least in principle, their actions haven't supported the notion of integration...it would be a hell of a loss of face if you suddenly change your mind (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 20).

The ideology that gave birth to the idea of an integrated framework, and subsequently the symbolism vested in such a framework, still seems to be the overriding factor. However,

...as much as ideology and visions and principles should drive policies...at some point we have also step back [and] say "but what does the empirical evidence say?" and if the empirical evidence is pointing in a different direction then you have to have an interplay between empirical evidence and ideological dispositions...The idea simply that for the sake of looking ideologically elegant [we have to have an integrated framework]...[but] are we sure we are remaining faithful to the ideological and social commitments we have to redress, equity, justice and so on? (Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure1, p. 8).

5.2.5 Conclusions: Policy Symbolism

Jansen (2001, p. 50) points out that 'politicians do not always invent policy in order to change practice'. However, it is evident that the political symbolism of an integrated framework has permeated all the sectors of education and training in South Africa and that, despite seeming political contestations, integration is being conceptualised and supported in many different forms.

From the data it emerges that the SANQF seems to be a symbol of the aspirations for a transformed society, and the integration of education and training is seen to be the key to achieve such aspirations. Unlike other countries, where an integrated framework tends to be of a technical nature, in South Africa integration is associated with the 'fair and just treatment' felt to have been denied to the majority of the population under apartheid. This is reflected in a number of ways. Firstly, it is displayed in the call for inclusion of groups previously excluded from education and training and consequently from improved life opportunities. Secondly, it is indicated by the ability to break through the impermeable barriers to progression characteristic of the previous system. Thirdly, a transformed society has to, in a sense, acknowledge those people upon whose backs the country was built, and recognise and award such people, hence the access and redress foci of the SANQF. Fourthly, integration symbolises the new democracy in two

senses. In one sense, the SANQF came into being by mandate of its citizenry; and the citizenry contributed to its construction and thus feels, perhaps for the first time, that their voices are heard, to the extent that they are called upon to help develop qualifications. The SANQF is thus the ordinary citizen's social construct meant to address historical prejudices against workplace-based learning and the perceived elitism of the previous system and, in aiming to lift the value of vocational education and training, earns the support of those who felt marginalised. According respect to learning, wherever it may occur, is seen to have the potential of giving equal social esteem to all the citizens of the country. In another sense, the SANQF is considered a victory in the fight for freedom on the education and training front and represents national liberation from an oppressive system. An integrated framework is thus an important heritage of the battle for human dignity and human rights.

However, the risks of infusing a qualifications framework with aspirations for a transformed society is that where these aspirations are frustrated, the effects are seen to be devastating. This is evident in the frustrations voiced about the current political impasse. Unfortunately, such symbolism could hide the real difficulties in achieving equal weighting of education and training. It is therefore possible that, at the current conjuncture of the implementation of the SANQF, stakeholders are ignoring the fact that an integrated framework may be very difficult to achieve even in jurisdictions where the moral imperative of a transforming society is not an issue. The data suggests that the problem is perceived to be with the two departments, which historically did not attempt to coordinate their efforts, a situation that consequently resulted in the turf wars between them. The divided ownership of the SANQF is seen to be another possible reason for the lack of implementation, while some ascribe it to the personalities of the two political heads, who are accused of having different agendas to the detriment of the implementation of an integrated approach. Thus, empirical evidence, which may point out, on a non-political level, that it is difficult to achieve an integrated framework, is ignored. Nevertheless, the lack of communication and/or coordination between the departments is seen to be inhibiting the implementation of an integrated approach elsewhere in the system and the respondents clearly articulate the frustrations felt at the coalface of education and training.

However, as Jansen (2001, p. 51) points out: ‘In broad terms, politicians and bureaucrats recognise the need for and the importance of symbolic policy in the production of policy and legislations [but] there is also recognition of the need to move beyond symbolic policy’. Therefore, while policy symbolism is undoubtedly important in reflecting a decisive break from an oppressive past, symbolism is not sufficient to effect major changes in the way in which an education and training system is constructed. However, it is evident that implementers have taken the notion of an integrated framework seriously and honestly attempted to go beyond symbolism, by infusing the framework with principles that will reflect the underlying ideology that resulted in the symbolic coming together of education and training. Social justice and social inclusion through a socially constructed system, is seen to be served by an integrated framework and consequently, integration seems to have become the guiding philosophy for the SANQF.

5.3 Guiding Philosophy

A guiding philosophy is ‘the underlying thinking that implicitly, often covertly, underlies the development and implementation of [an] NQF’ (Keevy, 2005, p. 2).

From the discussion of the SANQF as an example of policy symbolism, it is evident that the notion of integration is strongly driven by an underlying ideology, rooted in the inequities of the previous education and training regime. However, this does not explain the attempts, at the coalface of the system, to implement an integrated approach. A possible explanation for these attempts, despite the perceived lack of political will of the two departments, is that increasingly, integration is seen as a ‘meta-theme’ for the emerging system (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 18):

[It is not so much a question of] integration as a value, but for me integration is a meta-theme that includes issues of access, transparency, portability and so on. So, when we say ‘integration’, I think you have to, by definition, unpack it, because what we’ve got is, we’ve got conceptual integration, we want this to be a single integrated NQF. I would call it ‘operationalising integration’.

The first emerging theme for this part of the discussion, therefore, includes the discussion of integration as a meta-theme or a guiding philosophy for the principles underlying the development of the SANQF. The second theme deals with parity of esteem on three different levels: the social value attached to learning and, consequently, the social esteem awarded to holders of qualifications; parity between institutions; and

parity between qualifications, reflecting the social justice issues discussed in the previous section. (The latter will be explored in more depth in Chapter 6. Here the discussion will deal with parity of esteem as an example of the guiding philosophy for the SANQF as it relates to integration.)

5.3.1 Integration as a Meta-theme

One of the reasons for the limited progress in the achievement of integration as a central objective of the SANQF is that there does not seem to be a common understanding of the concept (Heyns and Needham, 2004). Therefore, the ‘unpacking’ and ‘operationalisation’ of integration either has not yet occurred, or it has been interpreted in different ways. As a meta-theme it could mean coherence, articulation and portability at a structural level, which are closely linked to the social purposes of the framework. COSATU, for example, typifies the SANQF as ‘socio-technical’, which is clearly associated with the expectations of the social groups who hope to benefit from an integrated framework (Annexure 4, p. 3):

The social construct nature of the NQF should be upheld, since it creates space for the generation of new knowledge that is socio-technical in character through social dialogue forums. This socio-technical character of the NQF is embodied in the principles embracing the different needs and expectations of constituencies.

This seems to mean that, while the SANQF is driven by social justice issues, it is underpinned by an attempt to make the ‘social’, ‘technical’, or what are called the ‘structural possibilities of the NQF’ (Blom, 2005, p. 11). The set of principles which seem to ‘unpack’ an integrated framework begin to do just that. In the conceptual framework for this study, integration, as the first of the SANQF principles, emerges as the ‘meta-theme’ for the rest of the principles of the framework. An integrated framework purports to enhance the social value of *all* learning achievements, thereby facilitating the achievement of parity of esteem between different components of the system. This in turn is meant to improve articulation and progression through the system in a more coherent manner and recognises that there are multiple pathways to achieve the ‘same learning ends’ (SAQA, 2001a, p. 10).

This is supported by the data. The CHE (Annexure 4, p. 4), in its response to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003), for example, uses integration as the meta-theme for the social

justice issues emerging from the rationale of an integrated framework in its comments on the proposals:

The fundamental principle...is a commitment to an integrated approach to education and training...characterised by equity of access, opportunity and outcomes; high quality provision, learning and teaching; learner mobility and progression; and, articulation between programmes, qualifications and institutions.

In the conceptual framework (Chapter 3), integration, as the meta-theme, or ‘guiding philosophy’ for the SANQF, is demonstrated in Figure 5.1.

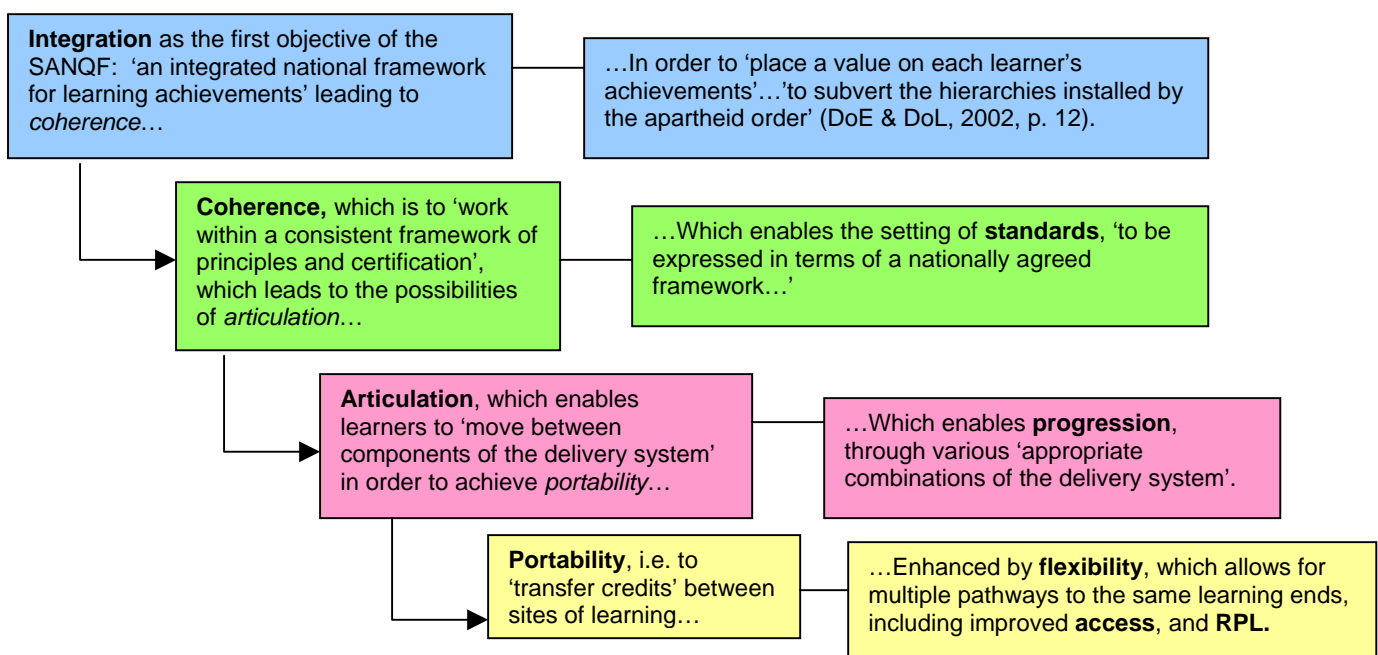


Figure 5.1: Integration as the Meta-theme or Guiding Philosophy for the Framework

Integration is thus seen to be ‘completely central to what is understood to be the [social] purpose of education and training in the country’ (SAQA Manager, Annexure 1, p. 18). Further, because ‘equivalence between [education and training] will not be achieved by political fiat’ (SAUVCA, Annexure 4, p. 12), the data reveals how the system attempts to bring to life the socio-technical nature of integration at a structural level. One of the key tenets of such structural arrangements includes the achievement of parity of esteem between different contexts of the education and training system, with the purpose, in line with international aims for frameworks, to achieve greater coherence, improve progression routes and clarify articulation between qualifications, particularly if these are achieved in different sectors of the system.

5.3.2 *Parity of Esteem*

Parity of esteem is thus closely associated with articulation routes, progression and mobility, as different interpretations of integration. For example (Eastern Cape Labour, Annexure 1, p.19), '...for the first time, we saw a system that was going to allow learners to move from bands and across, vertically and horizontally. That articulation was very important'.

Young, (2003, p. 10) says that 'parity of esteem is not a reality in any country'. The reasons he cites for this are continuing 'social inequalities' and 'differences between types of learning'. However, it is perhaps precisely because of such 'social inequalities' that parity of esteem is considered so important in South Africa, and 'in a context of where you are fighting apartheid and you are critiquing...on the basis that you thought that we are going to build a different economic and social system in the country', the complexities of achieving parity was over-simplified: 'We kind of dissolved complex binaries too easily...we were assuming that a particular COSATU model can dissolve paradoxes and contradictions' (Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 10).

Some of the 'paradoxes and contradictions' become evident particularly in the different ways in which parity of esteem is *not* achieved. Firstly, parity, in terms of the social value of all learning, is a highly contested notion (Ensor, 2003, p. 326):

...[T]he dominant educational thinking in South Africa from the early 1990s...signals a determination to erode three knowledge boundaries: between education and training, between academic and everyday knowledge, and between different forms of knowledge, disciplines or subjects. The erosion of these boundaries was expected to result in the collapse of a fourth: the social boundaries between groups on the basis of race and class.

Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training, agrees, and contests the notion that 'everyday knowledge' is on par with knowledge gained through institutional learning. Umalusi notes in its response to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) (Annexure 4, p. 5):

The difference is not just based on social perception of that workplace-based education and training has not been valued or that elites have used their disciplines to maintain the status quo. The difference is actually a fundamental fact of what education is – about knowledge that is

discontinuous, not continuous with every day experience. It takes people beyond the knowledge available to them through every day life.

This confirms the earlier point that the symbolic nature of the framework is masking the very real difficulties in implementing an integrated framework (see 5.2.5). This state of affairs, according to Umalusi, is partly because of quite practical matters:

The conditions for learning with breadth and depth are, of necessity, found in formal education institutions, because workplaces are unlikely to have the time or the trained and experienced staff to enable such learning to happen. It is not useful...to create a perception of a framework in which all qualifications can be obtained in all three pathways⁵, when in fact it does not seem realistic that higher levels of learning can be reached in the workplace.

However, secondly, while ‘there is a conceptual difference between education and training and...you ignore that difference at your peril’ (Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 45), under the previous regime, the system was designed to favour some people over others: ‘[t]he apartheid system of education and training 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, 2006, p. 3). Thus, while parity of esteem ‘in theory guarantee[s] equal opportunities and progression regardless of the learning pathway chosen’ and that such a strategy ‘would point out how vocational and technical programmes [for example] would need to be improved’ (Young, 1996, p.33), in South Africa, parity takes on a social justice meaning. With social justice as the ideology behind parity of esteem, it is not surprising that most respondents to the survey questionnaire⁶ indicated that, in principle, education and vocational qualifications are viewed as equally important (Figure 5.2).

⁵ Academic (i.e. in institutions), vocational (also in institutions) and occupation-based (workplaces).

⁶ 74/77 survey questionnaires completed in conjunction with structured interviews

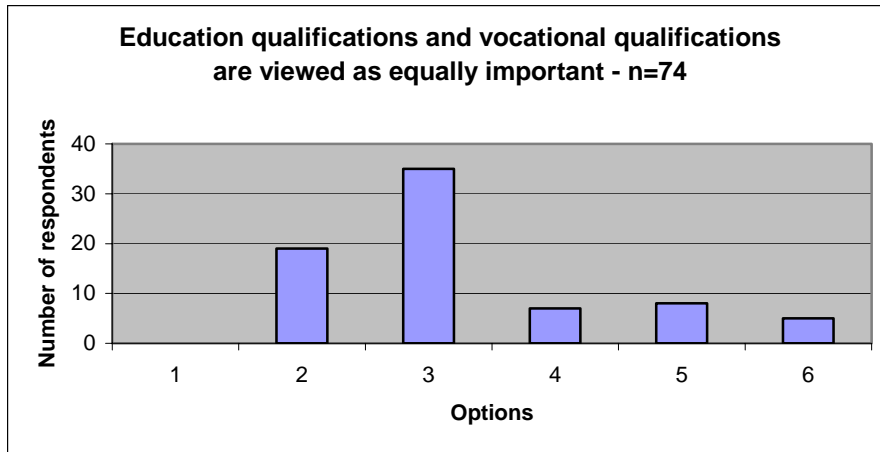


Figure 5.2. The Social Status of Education and Vocational Qualifications

Key: Option 1: Strongly disagree Option 4: Strongly agree
 Option 2: Disagree Option 5: Don't know
 Option 3: Agree Option 6: Too soon to say

However, while most categories of respondent agree that education and vocational qualifications are equally important, there are differences in opinion between 'Business', 'Professional Bodies' and 'Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies' (Figure 5.3).

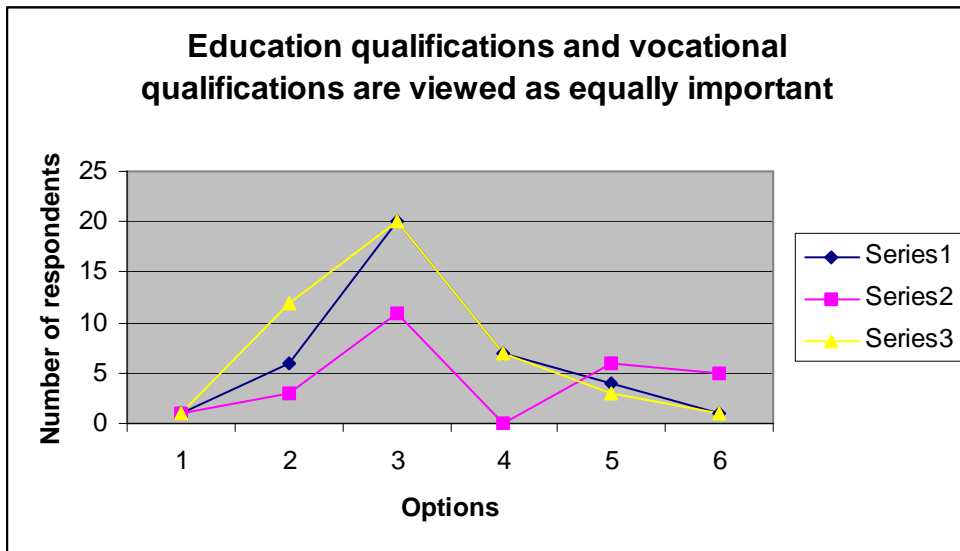


Figure 5.3. Educational and Vocational Qualifications: Business, Professional Bodies and Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies

Key: Option 1: Strongly disagree Option 4: Strongly agree
 Option 2: Disagree Option 5: Don't know
 Option 3: Agree Option 6: Too soon to say
 Series 1: Business
 Series 2: Professional Bodies
 Series 3: Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)

Most of the ETQAs (20/44) agree that education and vocational qualifications should be viewed as equally important, but at least a third of this category of respondents also felt strongly that this is not the case (13/44). This is borne out by the comments of some interviewees: ‘...[I]n some quarters vocational qualifications are not seen as equally important as educational qualifications. That kind of integration has not yet happened. Those who have gone through vocational training, their qualifications are seen as low’ (Organised Labour, Free State, Annexure 1, p. 17). Yet, others feel that particularly ‘vocational qualifications are gaining momentum in the country’ (Public HE institution, Annexure 1, p. 15) and that the SANQF is a tool to recognise parity:

...[T]he learning of people [is] recognized on an equal footing, if you like, and that qualifications that one achieves in every corner of the country, there is a mechanism for them to be recognised and to be registered via a tool where equality is given to their qualifications...So, I think...the establishment of this tool and of this mechanism brought about a lot of hope and excitement for people (Dept of Labour, Western Cape, Annexure 1, p. 14).

Nevertheless, the historical inequities influence how respondents and interviewees view parity of esteem as the *social value* assigned to learning.

In the third place, apart from the differences in education and training, and the social value attached to qualifications attained in these sub-sectors of the system, the expectation is also that the SANQF will attempt ‘to bring both the advantaged and previously disadvantaged to the same level’ (Learner focus group, Annexure 1, p. 17). Coupled with the perception that education is associated with privilege and elitism and representative of the old regime, parity of esteem is further complicated (SADTU, Annexure 4, p. 6):

The initial purpose of the NQF was to integrate education and training giving both, Labour and Education, equal weighting. However, the proposed new NQF is certainly skewed in favour of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Many argue that the new proposed system takes us back to the apartheid years where learning on the shop floor was considered inferior and out of the realm of Higher Education. In addition, those progressing through the Higher Education pathways are usually advantaged, with better resources and guaranteed better life opportunities – the NQF was intended to break this elitist status quo that was perpetuated by the apartheid regime in order to create a cheap and poorly skilled black labour force.

The Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (INSETA) (Annexure 4, p. 6) agrees with the view that ‘education’, as the opposite of ‘training’, traditionally resulted in better life opportunities for individuals in the ‘education’ sector. In its response to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) it notes that

[t]he real test for separated systems [such as those proposed by the *Consultative Document*] is whether learners have equal opportunities in reaching their full potential in such systems. For the main part such systems are resourced in such a way that the academic stream is always better endowed and learners who are able to progress in this stream have better life opportunities. The parity of resourcing for the various streams is crucial [for the proposals] to work.

In addition, the perception that some institutions are better than others introduces yet another dimension to parity of esteem: ‘[I]t depends on the historical background. X institution may always be seen as better than Y institution’ (Organised labour, Free State, Annexure 1, p. 16). The previously disadvantaged higher education institutions, in particular, see themselves in a negative light:

I think the university...and other institutions, of course, you would agree with me that it’s one of those...institutions that were established during the apartheid regime and most of its anticipated ideas were to put blacks far away from urban areas, second rated education, Bantu education (Public HE institution, Limpopo).

Thus, the notion that ‘now we have a system where, you know that whatever qualification you have, it will be recognised in terms of mobility’, does not necessarily hold water. Furthermore, learners still prefer certain institutions: ‘I think it is still biased. It’s issues of perception. We haven’t made the shift. I mean [learners] would still prefer WITS⁷ (FET institution, Annexure 1, p. 16). Likewise, inequalities seem to be perpetuated as graduates from some institutions are seen to be better prepared: ‘...[G]raduates from UCT or RAU...are given more preference than the person who comes from a bush university, so to speak’ (Employer, North West Province, Annexure 1, p. 18).

One interviewee for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2004), with considerable frustration, comments on the lack of parity between institutions (Public HE institution, Annexure 1, p. 33): ‘We are stuck because institutions have not

⁷ University of the Witwatersrand

demonstrated willingness to recognise [the equivalence between institutions]. The issue of equivalence of institutions and the power play between the institutions is a disadvantage to the learners’.

It is evident from the quantitative data that the perception that ‘everything that comes from the NQF, we all know the same thing, no matter which universities or colleges we come from’ (Public FET college, Mpumalanga, Annexure 1, p. 37) is not entirely correct. In relation to the perception of the quality of learning at some institutions, parity has not yet been achieved. In response to the statement ‘NQF qualifications offered by *some* institutions are seen as more portable than NQF qualifications offered by other institutions’, most respondents agreed that there is a perception that qualifications at some institutions are better than qualifications at other institutions. Integration, as parity of esteem between institutions, has not been achieved (Figure 5.4).

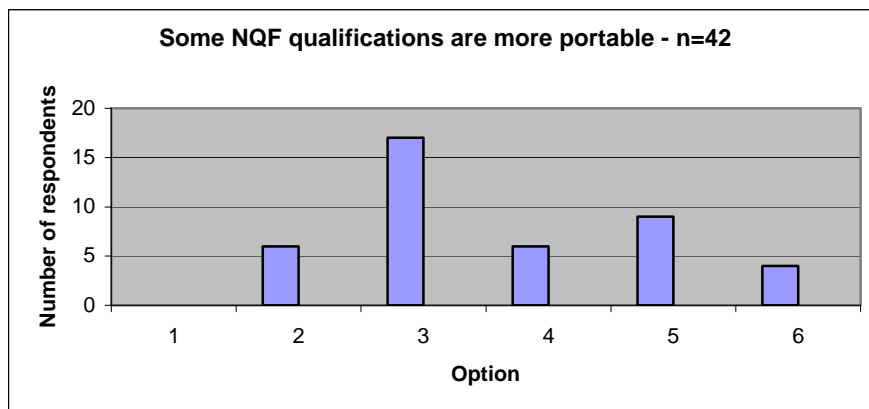


Figure 5.4. Some Institutions’ Qualifications are more Portable

Key: Option 1: Strongly disagree Option 4: Strongly agree
 Option 2: Disagree Option 5: Don’t know
 Option 3: Agree Option 6: Too soon to say

Again, this is borne out by comments by interviewees: ‘Is it really true that somebody can say go from a public FET college to actually a [higher education] institution? I’m not sure. I can’t really see it at the moment’ (Public HE institution, Annexure 1, p. 14).

Other respondents agree. For example, a teacher union commented that: ‘You find that in some areas we are told that we cannot access through this door, that articulation sometimes is limited by rules of combination within providers (Annexure 1, p. 19).

On the one hand, vocational education is seen to have become more valuable: ‘...[T]he approach seems to be widening the scope to structure and recognise on-the-job training, skills and vocational development programs and intermediary qualifications with clear career paths towards fully fledged professionals’ (Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), Annexure 4, p. 4). Other interviewees agree with this trend, particularly in the black communities (Private GET/ABET institution, Annexure 1, p. 15):

I don’t know in the white communities, but in the black communities the trend is changing now. In the past no black person wanted their children to go for technical training. It was regarded as inferior training. When you say you want to become a builder, people thought of someone, you know, there was the “wheelbarrow syndrome”. People thought of someone shoving a wheelbarrow, they never thought of designing a building structure, that was not part of building to them...that tells you that we are changing...[to] being people who are respected by the communities for being a contractor...you see people did not think that guys who are in technical were actually trained. For instance, you need mathematics, science and everything else, they just thought that [it] is a stupid trade...

On the other hand, many interviewees thought that ‘educational qualifications are still viewed as more important’ (Public HE institution, Annexure 1, p.18). SADTU (Annexure 4, p. 6) maintains that ‘the integration project’ was meant to give ‘workplace based and institution based learning an equal status’ and that the new moves in the system, namely to dis-integrate the framework would mean that

...those qualifications from [Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)] could be labelled inferior compared to those with qualifications from [Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)]. This is taking us back to the Verwoerd era whereby those with technikon qualifications were considered inferior as opposed to those with university qualifications. We are worried about issues such as access and articulation at this level.

The challenge to the emerging education and training system, therefore, seems to be how to ensure that the increasing convergence of qualifications ‘to the middle’ enhances parity of esteem of qualifications achieved in different sectors and institutions. SAUVCA (Annexure 4, p. 7), in its comments on *An Interdependent*

National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document (DoE & DoL, 2003), argues that

[a]n NQF that is a continuum of different qualifications at each level varying from “pure” general/formative qualifications at one pole, to “fully” vocational/career-focused qualifications at the other, will see most or all higher education qualifications tending to the middle over time...

Thus, instead of the “separate spheres” theology of the previous dispensation’ (SAUVCA, Annexure 4, p. 7), the challenge is to enable meaningful articulation without making a distinction ‘that this kind of education and training is better than *that* kind of education and training’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 14), but rather that the qualifications are fit for purpose, and not less valuable. It is evident from the quantitative data that respondents are in two minds about whether institutions value each other’s qualifications (Figure 5.5).

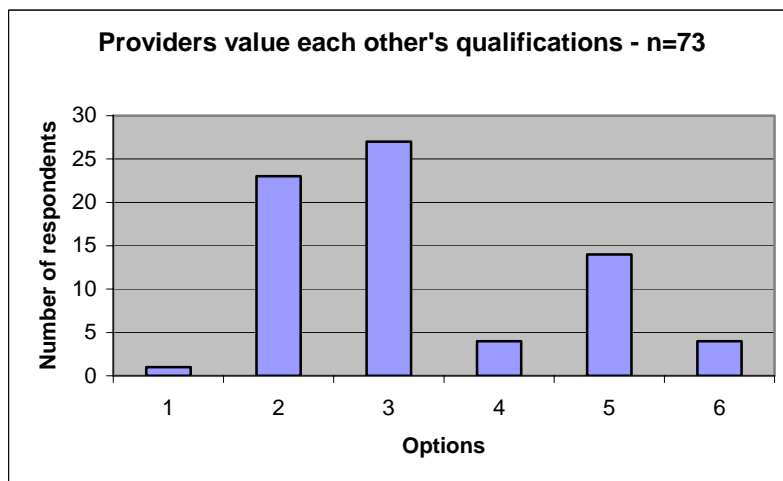


Figure 5.5. Institutions Value each other’s Qualifications

Key: Option 1: Strongly disagree Option 4: Strongly agree
 Option 2: Disagree Option 5: Don’t know
 Option 3: Agree Option 6: Too soon to say

More than a third of the respondents (27/73) felt that institutions do value each other’s qualifications, but possibly within a particular sector (for example, school to school, college to college), but another third of the respondents (24/73) disagree, or strongly disagree, or simply do not know (14/73). This clearly has implications for integration as the meta-theme for articulation possibilities, progression, portability of learning and

the mobility of learners within the system (Organised Labour, Free State, Annexure 1, p. 18):

With our experience we've seen people who have this certificate from an institution that was considered for [credit transfer], *depending on where they were coming from* and what they were able to produce. In certain cases there have been serious problems, where people had even forms of qualifications that were *not recognised* (emphases added).

It seems that parity of esteem, in any form, is thus still at a conceptual level: 'I think we are still meeting a lot of challenges with regard to mobility and progression. The principles are well stated but in terms of practice there are problems' (Gauteng Department of Education, Annexure 1, p. 19)

5.3.3 Conclusions – Integration as Guiding Philosophy for the SANQF

In this section it has become evident that, at different levels of the education and training system, integration is seen as the guiding philosophy for the SANQF, in particular, in the attempts to operationalise the principles of coherence, articulation, progression and portability. However, the guiding philosophy is not separated from the social justice issues that underpinned the development of the SANQF in the first place. Integration as guiding philosophy is thus socio-structural in nature. It is linked to the attempt to collapse social boundaries between groups as much as it is about improving the coherence of the system. However, even at a technical level, the system is grappling with the difficulties in achieving parity between learning routes, institutions and qualifications, and in reducing the difference between the advantaged and the disadvantaged and the associated life opportunities. The differences in esteem between institutions seem to stand proxy for the differences in social status and the esteem awarded to holders of qualifications. Historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs) and students, therefore, seem to see an integrated framework as a means to raise their social status. Further, it is also evident that even between similar institutions, (for example, university to university) and similar qualifications (for example, a Bachelor of Arts at two different institutions), improved esteem is not guaranteed. It is evident that 'parity of esteem' between institutions and types of qualifications is not simply a question of 'political fiat'.

Nevertheless, vocational education, (but not necessarily workplace-based training), is seen to have gained some status within particular communities.

5.4 Conclusion – Policy Symbolism and Guiding Philosophy

While it is evident that an integrated framework is a central symbol of the attempt to correct the ills of apartheid education, it seems to have become more than a symbol: it seems to represent a ‘social contract’ (Mehl, 2004, p. 22):

...[T]he NQF deals with the outcomes of education and training, namely qualifications, [and] it is an important social contract. Indeed, it goes to the very heart of how society recognises learning achievements in its midst.

As a ‘site of the struggle’ (Kraak, 1998, p. 1), education and training in South Africa had, under apartheid, become infused with the aspirations of those people denied opportunities and tired of the calculated mediocrity of the education available to them. An integrated framework thus has become more than a symbol – it has become the philosophy that underlies all thinking about the education and training system in this country. This may explain why a ‘political intervention intended to revisit, revise or even reverse policies around which the political agenda [may have] shifted’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 50) has met with such resistance to the proposed changes to the original rationale for the implementation of an integrated framework.

In this chapter it has thus become evident that an integrated approach to education and training not only came into being as resistance and reaction to apartheid education policies, but it also came to embody the esteem of learning achieved despite apartheid: ‘Despite these adverse conditions, countless black South Africans took every opportunity they could to learn. Over many years, for many individuals, much of this learning happened in workplaces and other areas of social endeavour’ (Mehl, 2004, p. 23).

Coupled with acknowledgement and recognition for learning attained against all odds, is the deeply felt burden of oppression and social exclusion. An integrated framework, therefore, also came to embody equal social esteem and respect, the value individuals bring to society and the freedom of choice, that is the ability to pursue ‘routes to the top’, regardless of the starting point, should an individual wish to do so.

In addition, the fact that those very individuals who, in the past, were excluded from decisions that influenced their life chances, contributed to and helped shape a vision for a responsive and responsible education and training system, could explain the passion and almost blind commitment to a ‘social construct’ that they feel they helped bring into being. This may certainly also explain the frustrations with the apparent lack of political will of the two departments (Education and Labour), to make the system work.

The central argument in this chapter is that policy symbolism is important, particularly in relation to ‘a caring, compassionate, fair and equitable society with public-interested identities oriented towards ‘collective good’ such as justice, fairness, honesty, human solidarity and respect for the dignity of the “other”’ (Parker, 2006, p. 36), but that it is equally evident that symbolism is not enough. Symbolism does not effect changes, evidently not even at the macro political level. Nevertheless, it is evident that, despite the lack of a ‘credible theory of action’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 89), which would spell out how, and by whom, large-scale changes would be effected in practical ways, there is much support for an integrated framework, to the extent that the symbolism of the integrated framework has become the primary perspective for ‘all new developments in our national learning system’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 1)

However, the hope and aspirations such a framework embodies, in promising to address the social ills of the past system, may mask the real and practical reasons for the difficulties experienced in the development and implementation of an integrated framework. Chapter 6 will view integration through a different, possibly more pragmatic, lens.