

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK – AN ENABLING MECHANISM TO BUILD CAPACITY WITHIN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

New Legislative Frameworks Governing Education & Training.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A series of initiatives beginning with the De Lange, Riekert and Wiehahn Commissions in the early 1980's, the ETD Practices Project and other similar initiatives culminated in the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) in the early 1990's and led to a broad consensus amongst business, labour and government around the need for a National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

During the period 1989-1994 COSATU, employers, providers of E&T, representatives from the old departments of education & labour and the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) began to look at ways to improve E&T.

In April 1994 the National Training Board published a discussion document on a National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI).

In 1995 the Government's policy document, "White paper on E&T gave details of the NQF and SAQA. Mainly Ministry of Education and Labour (IMWG) prepared the way for the SAQA Bill.

The SAQA Act (Act 58/1995 was passed on 4 October 95). This gave SAQA the power to set up the NQF.

WHAT IS THE NQF?

The NQF is a new approach to E&T. It provides opportunities for learning regardless of age, circumstances and the level of E&T. It allows for learning on an "on-going" basis -
LIFE-LONG LEARNING

This new system:

- ' Promotes learning from life experiences as well as formal learning situations.
- ' Provides access to nationally accepted qualifications.
- ' Recognises different forms of learning (full-time, part-time, distance, work-based, life experiences, etc).
- ' Nationally approved qualifications registered on framework for which credits allocated.

The transformational agenda of both employers and unions especially in the manufacturing industries paved the way for seeking a framework.

Problems faced by industry included:

- ' Shortage of skilled workers.
- ' Education not equipping workers with adequate literacy or numeracy skills for the workplace.
- ' Quality and scale of vocational training - inadequate.
- ' Strong separation of education & training (separation of mental and manual labour)
- ' Industry training - highly fragmented and ill equipped to deal with new challenges.

In view of all these problems business began to adopt & adapt strategies used in other countries for implementing training reforms.

OUTCOMES-BASED TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The most important such strategy was known as an **"OUTCOMES BASED"** approach to training used in their qualifications framework.

These frameworks had the additional merit of aligning qualifications more closely with job grading systems, thereby providing a mechanism for dealing with a range of industrial relations issues.

The simplest description of the **NQF** is that ***it is a mechanism for transforming education and training.*** (Other countries which have a NQF are United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand). It is a bold new initiative *that moves away from the old traditional and ideological education policies and practices of the past* and seeks to **revolutionise our thinking about what and the way we learned as well as creating a paradigm shift in our entire way in which we perceive education and training in its broadest sense (Formal and non-formal as well as industry based training)**

The broad strategy behind the use of qualifications frameworks has been to centralise control over the type of (what) education & training is nationally accredited, while de-regulating who should provide it and how, when or where it takes place.

The strategy is based on what is sometimes called an "assessment-led" logic of transformation³ and works in the following way:

- A central authority will decide on detailed learning objectives for each area of education & training. These are formulated as National Standards, & serve as the criteria against which a learner may be assessed in determining whether he/she is eligible to be awarded a qualification.
- Education & training providers adapt their learning programmes to enable learners to acquire the knowledge & skills needed to earn the qualifications (they are studying for)
- Standards leads the transformation in E & T.
- Quality is ensured by the state, centralising accreditation.
- By de-regulating other aspects, it frees E & T from traditional institutional & curricular boundaries.

The NQF potentially provides a mechanism for three levels of transformation:

1. At the level of systems

- E. & T. should operate as a more integrated system.
- Academic training and work-placed training coming together.
- E & T to be transformed into open learning systems.

2. *At the level of institutions*

Changes in admission requirements and procedures.

Learners entering and exiting learning programmes at different rates.

3. *At the level of "practice", or individual action*

Managing provider institutions differently.

Planning & facilitating learning activities for heterogeneous groups of learners progressing at different rates.

Assessing learners in relation to new curricula.

RATIONALE AND NEED FOR THE NQF

- Apartheid system in SA denied many people access to opportunities to gain information, skills and experience to develop and to allow for economic growth.
- Past educational practices (Bantu/CNE systems) did not allow for analytically thinking, critical thinking and creativity.
- Learners trapped in one learning situation.
- Much of learning in schools and colleges not very useful and valid.
- "Matric" - not a guarantee for work or further study.
- Majority of workplace training related only to one job.
- Many inequalities and restrictions placed in the education & training systems.
- Dismal record of productivity and job performance.
- Preference for academic qualification rather than technical/vocational skills.
- Increasing dis-satisfaction in trade & industry because E&T lagging far behind the international organisations in similar industries.
- Recognition of the need to create competencies required in a technologically demanding and competitive global economy.
- Knock-on effect high unemployment rate.

A nationally integrated system was proposed to transform the education and training system which will link lone level of learning to another and enable learners to progress to higher levels from any starting point in the E&T system.

The integration of the education and training system will be through the NQF. Learning and skills which people have acquired through experience and informal training will be formally assessed and credited towards qualifications.

The NQF will accommodate all those who are in schools, colleges, universities, technikons and those in work based programmes.

Education and Training must be seen as a lifelong learning process in order to enhance the quality of life for all!

THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA)

SAQA is the National statutory body promulgated in terms of the South African Qualifications Act (Act 58 of 1995) (passed on 4 October 95)

The aim of the Act:

- ' Create an integrated national qualifications framework for learning achievements.
- ' Facilitate access to, and mobility & progression within education, training and career paths.
- ' Enhance the quality of education and training.
- ' Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities and thereby:
- ' Contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

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FUNCTIONS OF SAQA

SAQA oversees and monitors the work of the following sub-structures:

National Standard Bodies (NSB's), Standard Generating Bodies (SGB's) and Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQA's)

SAQA & THE "OUTCOMES BASED" APPROACH TO BE USED IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE NQF

To achieve the kinds of transformation described earlier, SAQA will be using a set of concepts drawn from "outcomes-based" E&T (OBET) practice.

Outcomes-based approaches have been the basis of the qualifications frameworks used by all countries that have a NQF.

The central concept in OBET is "COMPETENCE"

Key features:

- < Initially used in OBET by those interested in describing what a worker needed to be able to do in order to be "competent" for a job.
- < If competence could be clearly described to allow for assessment, then employers will be able to assess whether workers had the competence for particular jobs & to plan how different jobs related to other jobs in the overall organization of work.
- < ("Outcomes" and "Assessment Criteria" is the set of terms referring to concepts developed in an attempt to describe competence so that it is measurable.

COMPETENCE - includes

1. Informing the providers of workplace training of what learning needed to take place in order for a worker to be competent;
2. Enabling learners to know what they needed to learn in order to pass a training course;
3. Enabling workers to know what they should be able to do in order to qualify for particular jobs.

EXAMPLES:

Some see competence as performance while others see it as the ability underpinning performance. Some describe competence by writing detailed descriptions of actions while others describe it more broadly.

SAQA has attempted to be as inclusive as possible.

One of the categories within the format SAQA provides for describing competence (without prescribing the content) is the category of “critical cross-field outcomes” which need to be built into all descriptions of competence.

SAQA will be using the outcomes- based framework to achieve the kinds of transformation described above. It will do so by setting up two sets of bodies under its authority viz. National Standards Bodies (NSB's) and Education and Training Quality Assurer's (ETQA's) each with specified functions and processes.

NATIONAL STANDARDS BODIES

These are representative forums in which: 1 government, 2 business, 3 labor, 4 education and training, 5 providers, 6 critical interest groups (women, youth, disabled) come together to agree on descriptions of competence for the field under their authority

They are responsible for describing the different kinds of competence and work in association with the SGB's for the setting of agreed national education and training standards.

There are 12 “organising fields” with an NSB for each and a Assistant Director tasked with overseeing its activities. The organising fields have been adopted as a way of dividing the work that needs to be done in describing competence into manageable areas of activity.

They are:

1. Agriculture and Nature Conservation
2. Culture and Arts
3. Business, Commerce and Management Studies
4. Communication studies and Languages
5. Education Training and Development
6. Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
7. Human and Social studies
8. Law, Military Science and Security
9. Health Sciences and Social Services
10. Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences
11. Services
12. Physical Planning and Construction

The NSBs are required to develop a regulatory classification for the delineation of sub-fields within which standards and qualifications will be generated, registered and provided.

The delineating of sub-fields within each organising field should be based on adequate and appropriate application of the following four criteria:

- ' Meeting the requirements for maximum coherence and minimum duplication.
- ' Identifying transformation and quality requirements, now and for the future.
- ' Inclusion of comparable delineation criteria emerging from international experience.
- ' Inclusion of emerging trends and developments in areas of endeavour within the field and sub-field

SGB's will be recognised and established in identified areas to generate the necessary standards. The NSB will recommend the standards to SAQA for registration on the NQF.

The role of NSB's will be to consider the proposals put forward by SGB's, to link the proposals coming from different SGB's and to recommend the official registration of standards to SAQA.

Standards will enable different providers to work towards the same standards thereby promoting better linkage between different categories of institutions

STANDARD GENERATING BODIES (AUTHORITIES)

They are responsible for the organisation and facilitation of NQF Unit Standards setting projects in a particular sub-field of learning at a particular NQF level.

SGB's will undertake the development of standards (descriptions of competence).

They will consult as wide as possible before actually writing unit standards and thereafter make recommendations to the NSB on what a unit standard will be.

Each SGB will put forward an explicit motivation for why the standards they are proposing should be adopted rather than other standards.

They will need to analyse the nature of E & T in their part of the field (sub-field), analyse the changing nature of society and economy and how this is likely to require different kinds of competence, and then develop standards which reflect the future competence which is required.

Put forward their proposals to their relevant NSB.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUALITY ASSURERS (ETQA's)

They are responsible for monitoring the quality of provision of E&T against NQF standards that have been set. Responsibilities included:

- T Accreditation of Learning Providers including the learning curricula that will be used by providers
- T Accreditation of assessors
- T Issue of SAQA endorsed certificates
- T Ongoing monitoring of learning providers, including the monitoring of internal and external assessments.