



**The inclusion of professional qualifications on the
South African National Qualifications Framework**

**Draft recommendations of the Review Panel
on Professional Qualifications**

20 October 2006

The recommendations in this publication were developed by the Review Panel on Professional Qualifications at the request of the South African Qualifications Authority. The choice and presentation of facts contained in this publication and the opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of SAQA and represent no commitment on the part of the Organisation.

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Introduction

The task of the Review Panel on Professional Qualifications

This document includes the draft recommendations of the Review Panel on Professional Qualifications¹ appointed by the South African Qualifications Authority. The main task of the Review Panel was:

- To review the recommendations of the empirical research on the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF in the light of the responses received from stakeholders²
- To conduct a workshop with stakeholders explaining the final position of the Review Panel³
- To make a recommendation for SAQA's consideration on the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF and matters related thereto.⁴

The Review Panel met on three occasions (26 April, 14 June and 6 July 2006), with a final meeting scheduled for 3 November 2006.

Background

In mid-2005 SAQA commissioned research to investigate and compile a detailed report on all qualifications currently registered as "professional" on the South African National Qualifications Framework. The research results, in the form of a report entitled *An investigation into the inclusion of qualifications currently registered as professional on the NQF* was completed in December 2005.

¹ Mrs Vihitha Beharee (SA Council for Educators, SACE); Prof. Hu Hanrahan (Engineering Council of SA, ECSA); Mr Chris de Villiers (Institute of Chartered Secretaries of SA, ICOSA); Mr Graham Terry (SA Institute of Chartered Accountants, SAICA); Prof. Hugh Jeffery (SA Institute of Mechanical Engineering, SAIME); Mrs Hasina Subedar (SA Nursing Council, SANC); Prof. Shajila Singh (Health Professions Council SA, HPCSA); Dr Raymond Patel (Chemical Industries SETA, CHIETA).

² The report "An investigation into the inclusion of professional qualifications currently registered as professional on the NQF" (SAQA, December 2005) is available from saqainfo@saqa.org.za.

³ This workshop takes place on 20 October 2006 at the Kopanong Conference Centre, Benoni.

⁴ The final recommendations will be based on the draft recommendations but will include input from the stakeholder workshop.

The report was released for public comment for the period 1 to 31 May 2006. The public comment period was subsequently extended to 21 July 2006. A total of 38 responses were received during this period:

Actuarial Society of SA (ASSA), Allied Health Professions Council of SA (AHPCSA), Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Association of Professional Institutes of Southern Africa (APISA), Central University of Technology Free State (CUT), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), Chemical and Allied Industries' Association (CAIA), Computer Society of SA (CSSA), Council on Higher Education (CHE), Durban Institute of Technology (DIT), Engineering Council of SA (ECSA), Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSET), Financial Planning Institute (FPI), Institute for Public Finance and Auditing (IPFA), Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB), Institute of Internal Auditors of SA (II ASA), International Academy of Reflexology and Meridian Therapy (IARMT), International Special Events Society (ISES), National Reflexology Association of SA (NRASA), North-West University (NWU), Professional Board of Optometry and Dispensing Opticians (PBODO), SA Council for Social Services Profession (SACSSP), SA Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), SA Institute of Electrical Engineers (SAIEE), SA Institute of Government Auditors (SAIGA), SA Institution of Mechanical Engineering (SAIME), SA Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA), SA Institute of Valuers (Northern Branch), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), University of Venda (UNIVEN), College of Law of the University of South Africa (Unisa), University of South Africa Office of the Vice-Principal: Academic and Research (Unisa VP), University of the Free State (UOVS), University of the Western Cape FET Institute (UWCFET), University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and Vaal University of Technology (VUT).

A summary report of public comments was prepared and considered by the Review Panel in the process of developing the draft recommendations included in this document.

Way forward

The stakeholder workshop of 20 October 2006 provides another opportunity for the Review Panel on Professional qualifications to consult with stakeholders on the proposed recommendation(s) on the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF so as to inform the final recommendation that will be submitted to SAQA in November 2006. The programme for the workshop can be found at the end of this document.

Concepts and definitions

The Review Panel - as well as contributors of comments - found that some of the definitions given in the report were unhelpful. The Review Panel reasoned as follows on definitions.

There is no one conclusive definition of a profession. However, an understanding of the distinctive characteristics of a profession suffices, namely: a service orientation, making expertise available to others; a distinctive body of knowledge and skills, coupled with abilities and values; autonomy in performance of work, within agreed boundaries; and public recognition of the authority of the practitioner by virtue of operation within ethical standards. The benefits of services offered by professions are accompanied, in different measure, by risks to the client and the public. Risks are of different types in different professions: (in)justice, financial, health, safety or environmental. Professions are therefore regulated. Two main models are regulation by a statutory body or by a non-statutory body that has the confidence of government, clients, practitioners and the public.

The definition of a **Professional Body** (lines 708-714) is satisfactory. It recognised that professional bodies may be statutory or non-statutory but perform the same essential functions:

A **Professional Body** is a body appointed to represent a recognised 'community of expert practitioners' and as such it devises, informs, monitors and continually updates the benchmark standards of competence, both academic and practical, required in the practice of the profession for which it is responsible. It is governed either by a statute or a constitution and has the necessary full time resources to carry out its functions. Major functions include quality assurance, assessment of professional competence, the conferring of professional designations and the right to practice, development and management of a code of professional/ethical conduct and ensuring the currency of knowledge of members through the implementation and monitoring of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes.

The commonly accepted definition of a **Qualification** (at line 848) is applicable in the professional fields:

A **Qualification** represents a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a

defined purpose or purposes, and which is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning. It adds value to the qualifying learner in terms of enrichment of the person through the provision of status, recognition, credentials and licensing the enhancement of marketability and employability and the opening up of access routes to additional education and training. It provides benefits to society and the economy through enhancing citizenship, increasing social and economic productivity, providing specifically skilled/professional people and transforming and redressing the legacies of inequity. It complies with the objectives of the NQF and has both specific and critical cross-field outcomes, which promote life long learning. Where applicable it is internationally comparable. It incorporates integrated assessment appropriately to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved and often uses a range of formative and summative assessment methods such as portfolios, simulations, workplace assessments, written and oral examinations and may indicate opportunities for recognition of prior learning.

The applicability of qualification, however, depends on the definition of a **Professional Designation** (at line 873) and the recommendation of the Report that the latter not be part of the NQF:

A **Professional Designation** is a title/status that is conferred by a Professional Body, which indicates the professional status of the individual and the right to practice in the particular field of expertise governed by that Body. Retention of this status is dependent upon compliance with the stated requirements of the Body concerned. These would typically include compliance with a Code of Professional Conduct, compliance with Continuing Professional Development requirements and the payment of fees. *An important corollary to this is that a designation is not a permanent status and may be revoked if non-compliance with any of the specified requirements occurs.*

The definition of an **Academic Qualification** (line 852) is unhelpful in distinguishing between professional and “other” qualifications. Many professional first degrees comply with this definition to a large extent. The definition of **Professional Qualification** (line 859) is problematic. The definition ties the qualification to registration (or equivalent operation); this

is not consistent with the recommendation to keep professional designations and hence registration outside the NQF. Also, a professional degree or diploma seldom, if ever, includes "... all learning and competency standards... for registration". The Review Panel does not find the concept of an academic qualification essential to the logic. The Panel offers an alternative definition of a professional qualification based on its consideration of the phases and milestones in the lifecycle of a professional person as described in the following section of this document.

Any definition of a professional qualification must deal with a diversity of models and the recommendation that a professional designation should not be a qualification in the NQF sense. The following definition is proposed:

A **Professional Qualification** is based on the learning requirements for a designated profession or professional category. The attainment of a professional qualification does not in itself automatically lead to a professional designation. A professional qualification must achieve the exit level outcomes of the qualification if it is registered on the NQF for the purpose and must thus be quality assured by the designated regulatory authority. A professional qualification may not be revoked.

This definition must be read with the definition of a Professional Designation in the Report.

Generalising the lifecycle and milestones in the professions

Sections 5.3 and 5.4 of the Report briefly examine typical models and steps to gaining professional status. Details of models vary from profession to profession. Figure 8 attempts to generalise the steps to gaining professional status. The Review Panel refined this view by considering possible phases and milestones in professional development.

Lifecycle of a professional

The lifecycle of a professional goes through a number of stages that, with appropriate emphasis, would apply to the majority of professions:

1. Education: obtaining an educational qualification at the level on which the qualification is registered on the NQF
2. Training and experience
3. In some professions, further or alternative elements not contained in 1 or 2
4. Assessment of competence leading to registration⁵, admission to practice, licensing as the case may be in different professions, and the award of a professional designation
5. Conditions for practice, may involve obligations including
 - maintenance of competency through CPD;
 - maintaining registration; and
 - working according to a code of ethics.

The systems in different professions place different emphasis on the various elements 1 to 3 above. More than one educational qualification may be required. Elements of education and training in 1 and 2 may be integrated or interleaved. There may be no requirement under 3. The various elements are explored below.

Education

The aspirant professional follows one (or more) programmes leading to qualifications. The purpose of these qualifications is twofold. On the one hand, they must provide fundamental,

⁵ The Panel recognises that there may be various categories of registration within a single profession.

applied and specialist knowledge relevant to the profession. On the other, exit level outcomes must be satisfied. This competency may not be at the level required for the professional designation; training and experience raise competency to the required level. These qualifications are intended to prepare persons to meet educational requirements toward registration in a profession and would therefore be regarded as professional qualifications. The exit level outcomes for these qualifications are, in most cases, registered on the NQF. Consequently, any provider that is accredited by the relevant Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA) and meets the minimum accreditation requirements on an ongoing basis could offer the programme. There are however some exceptions, such as the case of international qualifications that remain the intellectual property of the international awarding body. In such cases, the international awarding body has the option to register the qualification on the NQF and/or apply for accreditation with the relevant ETQA, and in so doing, exercise the choice to offer an internationally and nationally recognised qualification, or a qualification that is only recognised internationally.

Training

Once a person has satisfied the education requirements through the successful completion of one or more qualifications, further training and experience requirements must be fulfilled. The requirements are specified for each profession, for example in the form of a set of exit level outcomes to be demonstrated at a stated level in defined contexts.

This process of experience and training may lead to a qualification, for example if the training programme is structured as a learnership. As with the educational qualification, the exit level outcomes and level to be achieved are, in most cases, registered on the NQF and are quality assured by a specific ETQA. Such qualifications are, by virtue of their purpose, classified as professional qualifications on the NQF.

In the case where the exit level outcomes are registered on the NQF, only training providers that can achieve accreditation may offer the training programme and conduct assessment.

The purpose of this training is to develop the candidate to the level of competence (save for additional requirements, if any) required for entry to professional practice. Completion of

training per se does not confer the professional designation. Such qualifications may be designed to partially or fully develop the competence for registration.

Alternative or additional requirements

Individual professions may have requirements over and above education and training before a person can be assessed for the professional designation. Fulfilling these requirements does not lead to a qualification. These additional requirements may be an alternative to training programmes that lead to a qualification described in the Concepts and definitions section of this document.

Award of professional designation

The award of the professional designation or professional title, for example Professional Engineer or Chartered Accountant is the product of a separate competency assessment process. An applicant, irrespective of the route followed, must demonstrate competency against the standards prescribed for registration. This assessment is decoupled from any programme followed by the applicant and is performed exclusively by the profession or by a body accredited by the profession. The professional designation is not regarded as a qualification and is not registered on the NQF. Unlike a qualification, a professional designation may be withdrawn, surrendered or it may lapse.

Professional practice phase

CPD does not involve the award of qualifications. As stated in the report (line 1975), there are a large variety of activities that are acceptable as CPD, of which many are not learning programmes or courses. For this reason it is not necessary for CPD modules to be based on registered qualifications and/or unit standards. This does not exclude, in specific cases, CPD courses being based on registered qualifications and/or unit standards.

Examples of scenarios

The number of professional development scenarios that could arise from different

combinations of education, training and experience with serial or interleaved activities is large. Figure 1 shows just four of the many scenarios. Activities 1, 2 and 3 involve professional qualifications. Phase 4, the attainment of the professional designation is outside the NQF.

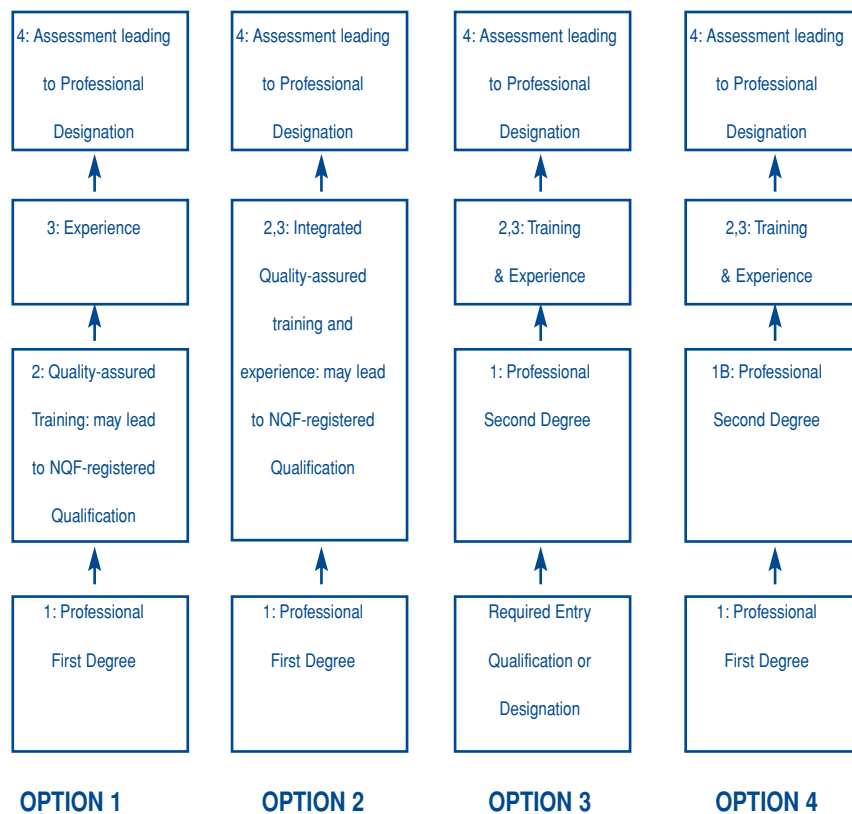


Figure 1: Four of many scenarios for professional development

The four scenarios presented above are not intended to represent all possible scenarios for professional development and have been presented as examples only. Non-statutory professional bodies, in particular, offer a number of alternative routes.

Additional issues

What purpose is served by typifying a qualification as professional?

The Report did not question whether the distinction between professional and other types of qualifications is fundamentally necessary. The following practical reasons exist for the professional classification of qualifications:

- Classification of a qualification registered on the NQF as professional indicates that a professional body, either statutory or non-statutory, has an interest in the qualifications development and quality assurance process.
- For Higher Education qualifications, the quality assurance arrangements should be the subject of an agreement with the HEQC.
- For industry-based qualifications, three different possibilities for quality assurance of the provisioning of the qualifications exist:
 - The SETA ETQA responsible for the qualification
 - The relevant professional body is accredited as an ETQA⁶
 - The relevant professional body comes to an agreement with a SETA ETQA
- The various HEQF drafts contain the type Professional Bachelor, etc.

While a more detailed interrogation of the role and responsibility of a professional body falls outside the mandate of the Review Panel, the following points have a direct bearing on the typifying of a qualification as professional.

The professional body should be able, if it so chooses, and if this is within its legislative or constitutive mandate, to:

- Endorse a professional qualification before registration on the NQF
- Be involved in the quality assurance of the delivery of the professional qualification, even to the extent that it can be accredited as an ETQA
- Deliver the professional qualification if it meets the minimum accreditation criteria of the relevant ETQA
- Conduct assessment of learners completing the professional qualification if it is accredited for this purpose by the relevant ETQA
- Certify learners against the professional qualifications if so mandated by the relevant ETQA.

⁶ In such case the professional body will be limited in the extent to which it can also offer the qualification.

What is the threshold for classification as professional?

The Report does not propose a threshold requirement for a qualification to be classified as professional. From the revised definition, the purpose of the qualification must identify its contribution toward attaining a professional designation and the Professional body responsible for the designation. This leaves the question of what is the threshold for a body to be recognised as professional. Possible criteria are as follows.

The authority and responsibilities of professional bodies are defined in two main ways:

- In the case of a statutory body, an Act and Regulations define the functions of the body.
- For a non-statutory body, a constitution, together with rules, defines the functions of the body.

The characteristic functions of a professional body of either type are the following. The body:

- Acts in the public interest
- Determines⁷ standards for professional competence and exit level outcomes for professional qualifications
- Quality assures qualifications, under agreements with other ETQAs where necessary
- Assesses persons against standards of professional competence or accredits parties to do such assessment on its behalf⁸
- Has mechanisms for ensuring compliance with a code of conduct.

The body must sufficiently delineate the responsibilities for determining standards, quality assuring programmes and assessing persons.

SAQA database issues

To search the SAQA database for a professional qualification the user must select Qualification Type. The list offered includes the conventional qualification types (certificate,

⁷ This word is chosen deliberately. The professional body need not do the detailed standards setting but must determine that a given set of standards must apply.

⁸ The professional body must not delegate the award of the professional designation.

diploma, bachelors, etc.) as well as apprenticeships, learnerships, professional qualifications and professional registration. Professional qualifications and the normal types are not mutually exclusive and should not be on the same list.

Draft recommendations

Based on the research report and comments made in this document, the Review Panel suggests the following draft recommendations for the inclusion of professional qualifications on the South African NQF:

1. The Review Panel's revision of the definition professional qualification be adopted, namely:

A **Professional Qualification** is based on the learning requirements for a designated profession or professional category. The attainment of a professional qualification does not in itself automatically lead to a professional designation. A professional qualification must achieve the exit level outcomes of the qualification if it is registered on the NQF for the purpose and must thus be quality assured by the designated regulatory authority. A professional qualification may not be revoked.

2. The Review Panel supports the recommendation that professional qualifications (in terms of the panel's definition) be included on the NQF.

This recommendation does not imply that qualifications that are not included on the NQF, such as those offered by international awarding bodies, are of a lesser value, or that such qualifications are not "professional". The recommendation does imply that only those qualifications that are registered on the NQF will be quality assured by the relevant ETQA and will enjoy national recognition, including articulation with other nationally registered qualifications.

3. The Review Panel is in agreement that Professional Designations not be included in the NQF. Professional bodies are however encouraged to publish the standards for professional competency in a form that supports the NQF objectives of integration, coherence of education and training requirements, articulation and portability.

4. The Review Panel concurs with the recommendation that Continuing Professional Development programmes should not be included on the NQF.

The Review Panel on Professional Qualifications

20 October 2006

PROGRAMME

	Chairperson for the workshop	Dr Raymond Patel (Member: Review Panel)
10:00–10:15	Welcome and opening address	Mr Samuel Isaacs (SAQA Executive Officer)
10:15–10:30	Overview of the Research	Dr James Keevy (SAQA Researcher)
10:30–10:45	Role of the Review Panel	Prof. Hu Hanrahan (Chairperson: Review Panel)
10:45–11:15	Summary of comments from stakeholders	Prof. Shajila Singh & Ms Hasina Subedar (Members: Review Panel)
11:15–11:30	Proposed recommendations of the Review Panel	Prof. Hu Hanrahan
11:30–12:00	Tea break	
12:00–12:20	Respondent 1	Ms Rachel Prinsloo (Unisa)
12:20–12:40	Respondent 2	Ms Mariëtta van Rooyen (APPETD)
12:40–13:00	Respondent 3	Ms Nawaal Patel (FASSET)
13:00–13:20	Respondent 4	Mr Andrew Carlsson (ICB)
13:20–14:00	Additional comments from the audience, summary & way forward	Prof. Hu Hanrahan
14:00	Lunch and departure	



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