



# **Q-AFRICA 2007**

**SAQA'S ROLE IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE**  
**OF**  
**OCCUPATIONALLY-DIRECTED QUALIFICATIONS**

**CHRISTO BASSON**

**DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

**SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

## **Structure of the Presentation**

Structure of the presentation:

- 1. SAQA's role in the quality assurance of occupationally-directed qualifications in the current dispensation.**
- 2. SAQA's in-direct role in quality assurance**
- 3. Challenges of the current system**
- 4. SAQA's quality assurance role of occupationally-directed qualifications in the envisaged future role of the Quality Councils.**
- 5. Challenges of the envisaged system**
- 6. SAQA's role according to the Joint Policy Statement by the Ministers.**
- 7. Ambiguities and areas that need clarity.**
- 8. Conclusion**

### **1. SAQA's role in the quality assurance of occupationally-directed qualifications in the current dispensation.**

According to the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) SAQA is inter alia responsible for the accreditation of Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs). These bodies act as "agents" for SAQA in the quality assurance of the delivery of qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework.

Currently there are 31 ETQAs accredited for quality assurance purposes of which 29 are responsible to oversee the delivery of occupationally-directed qualifications. Of these 29 ETQAs, 23 are also Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) as proclaimed by the minister of Labour, 3 are statutory bodies and 3 are non-statutory bodies.

The SETA ETQAs were accredited by SAQA, based on their areas of primary focus that co-incides with the Standard Industry Codes (SIC) of the Department of Labour. SAQA accredits these ETQAs to quality assure the specific occupationally-directed qualifications that falls within their primary focus. As new qualifications are developed and registered, the accreditation of the mentioned ETQAs are extended along the same lines of primary focus, as well as the purpose and rational of the new qualifications.

SAQA's role is further to monitor the quality assurance responsibilities of these ETQAs. This we do through cyclic monitoring interventions according to detailed criteria. We also conduct targeted monitoring in areas of high risk such as fire-arm training, driver training and the like.

The monitoring interventions are formative in nature and the reports make provision for suggestions on the improvement of quality in the delivery of occupationally-directed qualifications. Development plans are required from ETQAs that clearly defines actions, resources and time-frames for the closure of identified non-compliances.

The monitoring interventions are followed by compliance audits. Compliance audits are aimed at establishing the ETQA's compliance against its regulatory requirements. Audits are judgmental in nature and any non-compliance identified has to be rectified for the continuation of the ETQA's accreditation. Both the monitoring and auditing happens on a three-year cycle.

On 27 September 2005, all accredited ETQAs were declared compliant and their accreditation was extended for another three-years. This indicated a certain level of maturity within ETQAs and the time was ready to introduce Performance Auditing.

The first step in performance auditing is a self-evaluation by the ETQA to test the level of compliance before the performance audit can commence. In performance auditing the ETQA must now show evidence of performance against policies and procedures. Performance is measured in terms of Effectiveness, Efficiency and Economy. The ETQA is evaluated against agreed-upon quality indicators that need to be achieved against all policies and procedures. It measures the outcomes of systems, and the impact that it has made as well as the review of such, where required. It also deals with customer satisfaction and feedback.

SAQA introduced a moderating body that focussed on possible standards drift between ETQAs. This specific moderating body focussed on processes of assessment and moderation as implemented across all ETQAs.

## **2. SAQA's indirect role to quality assurance of ETQAs with their providers in the current dispensation.**

ETQAs are responsible to accredit providers. They do so against criteria that includes the following:

- ❖ The provider must be a legal entity.
- ❖ The provider must have the capacity to deliver in terms of HR and assessment requirements.
- ❖ The provider must have physical resources such as buildings and workshops where applicable and the necessary equipment.
- ❖ They must also have the financial resources.
- ❖ All must be encompassed in an integrated quality management system

As part of the provider accreditation the ETQA will conduct programme approval. Programme approval will include curriculum, learning material and assessment criteria developed by the applying provider that will meet the outcomes and exit level outcomes, of the qualification the provider wants to offer.

Once accredited the ETQA must monitor provision by the provider on an ongoing basis. This is done by conducting site visits and evaluating portfolios of evidence. Assessments are moderated internally and the ETQA also verifies assessments and moderations completed, on a sample basis.

Once this external verification has been concluded, the ETQA will issue certificates to successful candidates. Learner enrolments and learner achievements are uploaded onto the National Learners Records Database (NLRD) of SAQA.

Policies and procedures of the ETQA are reviewed by the ETQA as part of the quality cycle, described in the quality management system.

### **3. Challenges of the current system**

- ❖ The possibility of standards drift and different interpretation and implementation of the processes of provider accreditation and programme approval exists.
- ❖ In certain ETQAs there seems to be a lack of capacity to do the required monitoring of provider provision.
- ❖ Due to the principle of one provider one ETQA, Memoranda of Understanding becomes important, as this ensures any provider can have access to any qualification. These MoUs have recently reached a level of maturity that the system is now working effectively
- ❖ Turn-around times on any number of ETQA processes are seen to be problematic due to capacity within certain ETQAs.

Having stated the challenges in the current system, it is also true to state that ETQAs have developed and were supported during the past five to seven years of existence. A lot of expertise and know-how exists and systems evolved and were reviewed to a level where quality is evident and implementation is working.

### **4. SAQA's role in the quality assurance of occupationally-directed qualifications in the envisaged future dispensation.**

It is important to note that SAQA's envisaged future role, and therefore the role of the ETQAs have not been clearly defined as the documents there are currently based on, have no formal status as yet.

It is SAQA's interpretation that there seems to be a general notion of centralising functions and activities of ETQAs back to the Department of Labour.

The quality assurance functions of ETQAs will be centralised and will be performed by the proposed Quality Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO). SAQA's role in monitoring and auditing of ETQAs will therefore to a large extent be taken over by the QCTO.

"Executive authority for standards generation and the quality assurance of qualifications, provision and learning achievements will be undertaken by the three Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs)"

"The QCTO will have the authority to delegate selected functions of (but not the responsibility for) standards generation and quality assurance to appropriate organisations, including non-statutory professional bodies and ETQAs. "

SAQA's role will become to "Audit the QCs compliance with the objectives on the NQF."

The QCTO will accredit providers against minimum criteria that will focus on whether or not the provider is a legal entity compliant with the laws of South Africa. Programme and workplaces will be approved and the requirements will be outlined in the curriculum. A provider will have to demonstrate that it has the following in place:

- ❖ Human and physical resources
- ❖ Learning and assessment processes and materials
- ❖ Health and safety procedures
- ❖ Managerial and administrative support.

"The regulatory and quality assurance functions of SETAs will be coordinated to achieve a more effective use of the resources required for monitoring, evaluation, verification, record keeping and reporting."

Qualifications generated by Communities of Expert Practice (CEPs) of the QCTO will include a curriculum framework as well as assessment criteria. The notion of having a curriculum framework and assessment criteria included in each qualification, will assist in the process of programme approval and will also eliminate standards drift to a certain degree.

Whereas assessments were done on the formative level with some assessment on exit level outcomes, the proposed new system will introduce a formal summative assessment. "The final summative assessment of occupational competence is the key to the quality assurance of OQF occupational qualifications. The QCTO will accredit regional assessment centres, which may include institutions of occupational excellence (ISOEs) or workplaces, to conduct such assessments."

It is further envisaged that SETAs and other suitable agents will by way of delegation monitor learner progress and keep records of enrolments, completion rates, and certification rates per programme.

The QCTO will centrally be responsible for the issuing of certificates. It is envisaged that the following will be issued:

- ❖ National Occupational Award (registered on the NQF)
- ❖ National Skills Certificates (registered on the NQF)
- ❖ National Fundamental Learning Certificate NFLC (an access requirement)

## **5. Challenges of the envisaged system**

The new envisaged system will inevitably have new challenges that are inherent of a new system

- ❖ Although the documentation proposes that the QCTO will "draw on the extensive work undertaken in past years under SAQA's aegis, and utilise the capacity of the relevant SETAs as well as statutory and non-statutory professional bodies in the respective areas", the same document is proposing a completely new structure with new concepts and new reporting lines. All of this puts at risk the capacity that will be available and utilised for roll-out in the envisaged time frames.

- ❖ The detailed work of standards generation and quality assurance of qualifications and providers will be performed by Committees of Expert Practice (CEPs). Although we understand that CEPs will consist of a pool of people and different skills will be drawn from different people, a lot of responsibilities that are currently performed by a combination of Consultative Panels (CPs) and full time employees of 23 ETQAs division, are now allocated to professional people that will make their services available on an ad hoc basis. Once more we believe the capacity might not be there.
- ❖ The summative assessments proposed will be an intervention on a specific date at a specific venue. This dates and venues might fall within the working hours of learners and may be scheduled at venues outside of their work place. We see massive logistical arrangements at high costs to implement this.
- ❖ It is not clear from the document who will be responsible to gather learner enrolment and achievement data and who will be responsible to submit to the SAQA NLRD in the specific format. It might even be that data sits in two different places that place a risk on the system.
- ❖ Although the current model of having compulsory fundamentals in qualifications has its own challenge, the introduction of the Foundational Learning Certificate will have its own challenges. It is going to be yet another logistical and administrative blockage for a developing system. The fact that learners will obtain qualifications further on in the OFO without fundamentals, makes articulation to other systems challenging. No formal recognition will be given, other than access to the occupational system.

## **6. SAQA's role according to the Joint Policy Statement by the Ministers.**

According to the joint policy statement by the two Ministers, "SAQA will continue to be the dedicated national oversight body for the development of the NQF with a particular responsibility for monitoring, analysis, research, advocacy and international liaison". SAQA will report back to parliament on the effectiveness and impact of the NQF.

"SAQA will:

- ❖ Evaluate the impact of the NQF and its structures in relation to the achievement of its objectives
- ❖ Report and be accountable to the Minister of Education
- ❖ Advise on the impact of the NQF, further development and improvement of the NQF, and give on-going assistance to the QCs to resolve any emerging problems
- ❖ Execute the annual remit issued by the Minister of Education
- ❖ Ensure that the articulation and progression mechanisms between the different qualification types meet the objectives of an integrated NQF.
- ❖ Maintain and develop level descriptors for the NQF
- ❖ Advise the Ministers of Education and Labour on criteria for national standards and qualifications in consultation with the QCs
- ❖ Maintain and develop the register of national qualifications
- ❖ Set national criteria for the registration of various qualification types according to the policies of the Ministers of Education and Labour
- ❖ Register unit standards and qualifications approved by the QCs if they meet national criteria

- ❖ Audit the QCs compliance with the objectives of the NQF
- ❖ Maintain and further develop the National Learners' Records Database for the NQF
- ❖ Evaluate foreign qualifications for comparability with qualifications registered on the NQF
- ❖ Collaborate with local and international NQF implementation agencies on all matters of mutual interest and benchmark their work against leading practice locally and internationally
- ❖ Conduct or commission research and publish documents on matters related to the development and implementation of the NQF, and
- ❖ Promote the objectives of the NQF in all its work.

Although the above are not all directly relating to the quality assurance role of SAQA as suggested by the Joint Policy Statement by the Ministers, it must be understood that the quality assurance responsibilities are to some extent driven by the design of the qualification type, and the above completes the context in which the quality assurance responsibilities for SAQA are set.

### **7. Ambiguities and areas that needs clarity**

Although we understand this is a draft policy statement and more clarity will be given as Regulations are developed, certain ambiguities are evident in the draft documentation:

- ❖ SAQA will report back to parliament, but it also states SAQA will report and be accountable to the Minister of Education. Could this imply, accountable and report on the execution of the remit to the minister, but report to parliament on the effectiveness and impact of the NQF?
- ❖ Section 23 of the Joint Policy statement says: "The QCTO will coordinate and streamline the ETQA functions of SETAs and the non-statutory professional bodies accredited as ETQAs and take over responsibility for identified shared services relating to trades, occupations and skills which cut across economic and social sectors. The Draft Quality Assurance Framework refers to: "The QCTO seeks voluntary cooperation, and recognises the independence of the professional bodies, both statutory and non-statutory." The one document refers to a voluntary working relationship vs. the formal streamlining of ETQA functions in the other document.
- ❖ The Joint Policy Statement by the Ministers identifies as one of SAQA's roles: Audit the QCs compliance with the objectives of the NQF." This compliance audit does not refer to any performance audit, nor does it give any criteria other than against the objectives of the NQF. The Draft Quality Assurance Framework states: "As the QCF will be an integral component of the NQF, the QCTO will cooperate with SAQA as needed." No mention is made of SAQA's audit function.
- ❖ SAQA is to set national criteria for the registration of various qualification types. These criteria are according to policies set by the Ministers of Education and Labour. The QCs however will recommend the criteria for national qualifications, unit standards and modules to the respective Ministers for approval as policy. So who in the end is responsible to set the criteria for the registration of national qualifications?

From the above it should be clear that both documents clearly need unpacking and detailed discussion between the relevant authorities and envisaged authorities.

## **8. Conclusion**

I'm of the opinion that everybody is pleased to see the end of the NQF review process that seemed to be never-ending. The proposals will have major implications for all structures and many people currently within the system. It is a pity that the review process seemed to have created a new system rather than to build on the areas of strength as it claims it would be doing and only to change what all agree did not work.

Developing a new system, especially in the case of the QCTO being responsible for occupational qualifications on all levels, requires capacity. My understanding is that the lack of capacity might to a large extent be overcome by delegation back to the entities that currently have built up the capacity. This delegation will however be under the new rules of the QCTO as the accountable body. Whichever way you look at the envisaged new system, it would require longer time frames of implementation due to capacity.

In the current system there were areas of contention that were created by legislation and specifically by regulations that seemed to be in conflict with each other. The Joint Policy Statement suggests that amendments should be made to legislation to enable the new system. It is imperative to ensure that alignment between all legislation and Regulations will be achieved to ensure a smooth running system. Disparities of the past should not continue and examples would include the Registration of Providers with Department of Education vs. Accreditation by ETQAs, now QCs. Amendments to the Skills Development Act giving effect to the quality assurance responsibilities of the QCTO should take into account the current requirement of the Act that all SETA have 18 months to be accredited by SAQA to become an ETQA with quality assurance responsibilities.

I see SAQA's key and most important role in the envisaged system as the body that will have to ensure that the three Quality Councils, with their different qualification frameworks and their different ways of quality assuring, have equitable standards that would allow a learner progression and articulation between systems, and that the political willingness to find this linking is evident.