Work and learning are two important processes. How do these two processes interact with each other? Is workplace learning effective in South Africa? Are we getting value for the enormous amount of money spent on workplace learning? Do we understand enough about the challenges and complexities of workplace learning? The issue of work and learning runs through most of the articles in this double edition of SAQA Update.

Researching work and learning

Researching work and learning seminars provides an overview of the seminars that SAQA is hosting together with INSETA and UWC to highlight the seriousness of the situation with regards to work and learning in South Africa. The speakers were Shakeel Ori from Durban University of Technology (Aug), Prof. Anthony Watts from the UK (Sept), Prof. Knud Illeris from Denmark (Oct) to be followed by Dr Jenny Horsman from Canada (Feb 09). In Work-integrated learning Shakeel Ori explains the close cooperation between the workplace and the higher education institute.

Prof. Tony Watts delivers the 8th SAQA Chairperson’s Lecture and captivated the audience about the need for better career guidance services. Just prior to Prof. Watts’ visit, SAQA convened a career guidance workshop facilitated by Patricia Flederman where she shared the outcomes of her environmental scan on career guidance in South Africa (Navigational tools in career guidance: constructing work and study paths).

Demystifying learning@work tells us about Prof. Knud Illeris’ wonderful presentations to the NQF colloquium, a breakfast in Pretoria and a seminar in Cape Town. Prof. Illeris urges us to put the learning process, which is a complex one, back at the centre of the debate.

Information systems and online learning

SAQA practises what it preaches in Harvesting in the NLRD, which tells us about the learnerships at SAQA. Find out how you too can verify your qualifications at no cost in The SAQA-NLRD qualification verification service. SAQA continually tries to improve its services to clients by introducing services such as the New features of the searchable databases of qualifications and unit standards on the SAQA website. The NQF Support Link continues to grow – workshops have increased to three days and a new module on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has been released. So It’s full steam ahead for the NQF Support Link.

Commonwealth of Learning

SAQA, which actively involved with the Commonwealth of Learning, gave a paper at the 5th Pan-Commonwealth Conference. Developing countries, especially the smaller Commonwealth countries, are highly exposed to bogus higher education colleges. Read more about this in Degree mills: a special threat to learning.

SAQA has signed a Commonwealth of Learning Joint Implementation Plan to develop computing standards underpinning a Commonwealth Computer Navigation Certificate. Similarly SAQA was involved in developing The ITC Qualifications Framework, which is a breakthrough in generating qualifications and standards for the ITC sector.

Research imprint

With sadness we record the loss of our colleague Professor Ben Parker, who tragically passed away on 27 October 2008. Prof. Parker sat on a range of ministerial committees and was head of the Schools of Education at UKZN and Fort Hare. Prof. Parker’s research imprint on the NQF will be felt for years to come (In Memoriam: Prof. Ben Parker). In his short time at SAQA, Dr Parker played a major role in charting SAQA’s research agenda, which you can read more about in Evolution of SAQA’s Research Directorate and its partnership model.

Dance, auditing and customer care

SAQA is becoming famous for its metaphor of Celebrating dance. This was nowhere more in evidence than at the Sculpture unveiling and launch of the Annual Report. SAQA has completed its cycle of Performance Auditing the Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies and has released a trends report on this subject. Lastly SAQA has given customer care a boost in Customer care at SAQA.
Researching Work and Learning

Researching Work and Learning Seminars

By Yuven Gounden, Deputy Director: Communications

Millions have been spent on education and training. The time has come to hit the pause button and look at what is happening in the field of work and learning. A series of seminars on researching work and learning is currently under way, hosted by INSETA, SAQA and UWC. The idea is to deepen our understanding of researching work and learning by bringing in four world-class experts.

Work-integrated learning is a critical area in researching work and learning. Shakeel Ori is head of the Department of Co-operative Education at Durban University of Technology. He has a long history in work-integrated learning, which is an integrated approach to higher education that combines academic learning with associated workplace experience achieved via the relationship between the university, its students, industry and the community.

Career guidance has a significant impact on work and learning. Professor Tony Watts is a past director of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC) in the UK. His work covers theory, policy and practice in all sectors of career education and guidance, including schools, further and higher education, and adult guidance.

Learning@work has increased in status over the past 10 years. Professor Knud Illeris, Professor of Lifelong Learning at the Danish School of Education at the University of Aarhus, explained the nature of learning in the workplace. He exemplifies the true spirit of adult education, as he left a promising career as a travel agent at the age of 27 to begin his higher education.

In February 2009 Dr Jenny Horsman will explore the topic Women, Violence and Learning. Dr Horsman, who is based in Canada, is a community-based literacy theorist, educator and researcher with two decades of experience in the adult literacy field in England, Sierra Leone and Canada.

She has developed curricula, conducted training and facilitated workshops. Her doctoral research on women and literacy in rural Nova Scotia, and her work in tutoring, led Dr Horsman to investigate connections between women’s experience of violence and their success at learning.

Prof. Tony Watts in discussion with SAQA staff at the staff seminar.
The seminars at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof Tony Watts</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Career guidance in the workplace</td>
<td>30 Sept 2008</td>
<td>Chairperson's Lecture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
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<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>Career guidance in the workplace</td>
<td>03 Oct 2008</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Knud Illeris</td>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>Learning@work</td>
<td>28 Oct 2008</td>
<td>NQF Colloquium</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>Learning in and for working life</td>
<td>29 Oct 2008</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td></td>
<td>31 Oct 2008</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Jenny Horsman</td>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>Women, violence and learning</td>
<td>09 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<td>Women, violence and learning</td>
<td>10 Feb 2009</td>
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<td>Durban</td>
<td>Women, work and learning</td>
<td>11 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>Women, work and learning</td>
<td>13 Feb 2009</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
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Work-integrated learning

By Jill Bishop, Assistant Director: Communications

South Africa is desperately short of well-trained and well-qualified workers, and thousands of people need to upgrade their qualifications but cannot afford to study full-time. However, the situation is not as bleak as it seems – there is hope in the form of work-integrated learning (WIL).

This critical field includes in-service training, where a student is placed in a relevant industry to learn on the job, with the emphasis on learning by doing. This work-integrated learning, or experiential learning, must be structured, coordinated and supervised by specialist staff and workplace supervisors/mentors.

An effective combination of academic learning and associated workplace experience is achieved through collaboration between the university, its students, industry and the community. For this reason, relevant industries and communities are extensively involved in developing curricula that are relevant to the needs of the marketplace and thus produce employable students.

Shakeel Ori, who has a long history of involvement in WIL, is head of the Department of Co-operative Education at Samuel Isaacs, Executive Officer of SAQA, introduces the theme.
Durban University of Technology. He was the speaker at a breakfast held on 22 August 2008, arranged by SAQA and sponsored by INSETA. The seminar specifically targeted the insurance sector, banks and SETAs. Approximately 80 people attended the seminar, which opened up debate about the role of WIL in the insurance sector.

Ori pointed out that ‘learning by doing’ is not new – in fact apprenticeships pre-date all universities. This model, which in some cases involved mere mimicry with few cognitive processes, has been superseded by experiential learning, which involves exposing students, under guidance, to ‘real-world’ experiences. Cooperative education – a partnership between the student, the University of Technology and the industry – creates opportunities for experiential learning in an authentic context (institution or work).

The specified learning outcomes must deepen the understanding of students progressively, whether the outcome is achieved in the classroom or the workplace, and reflection should be central to the entire process.

Employers are the most powerful ‘instructors’; the workplace provides real-world situations, real-world challenges and real-world solutions which are invaluable to students’ learning. But work placements must be carefully judged: workplace experience must be accredited by suitably qualified and experienced academic staff, and the outcomes that can be achieved in a particular workplace must be clearly defined.

Work-integrated learning has several benefits:
- Academic results improve (because of the close correlation between theory and practice).
- Learners gain permanent jobs more quickly and command better starting salaries.
- Enthusiastic, motivated students add value to the workplace.
- Employers save on recruitment costs and can employ those that they have ‘screened’ during work-integrated learning – without Labour Relations Act implications.

Nevertheless, there are several challenges:
1. Practices; pedagogies; structure
2. Policies: academia and workplace
3. Sustainability of partnerships
4. Learning contexts
5. Innovations in learning, e.g. e-tools
6. Ideologies
7. Effective training of academic cooperative education practitioners and workplace mentors
8. Assessment
9. Relationship of ‘learning organisations’ to health and societal issues
10. Post-WIL career paths
11. Post-WIL learning and research
12. Post-WIL entrepreneurship development.
Prof. Tony Watts delivers the 8th Chairperson’s Lecture

By Yuven Gounden, Deputy Director: Communications

Professor Tony Watts of the British National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling spoke on his area of expertise, career guidance, at the 8th annual SAQA Chairperson’s Lecture on 30 September 2008. The event formed part of a week of breakfast meetings, seminars, press conferences and workshops held during Prof. Watts’ brief visit to South Africa under the banner of ‘Researching work and learning’.

Prof. Watts is a Founding Fellow of the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling (NICEC). He was a co-founder of the career development organisation CRAC, and was Director of NICEC from 1975 to 2001.

His work covers theory, policy and practice in all sectors of career education and guidance, including schools, further and higher education and adult guidance. In recent years his main interests have been in evaluations of innovative practice and in policy-related studies both national and international. He has been a consultant to a number of international organisations, and worked for the OECD from 2001 to 2002. His recent and current work includes a review for the European Training Foundation on career guidance in the Middle East (with Professor Ronald Sultana), a survey of new arrangements for Connexions/careers services for young people in England (with Allister McGowan), and a review of Careers Services in New Zealand.

SAQA has always used the Chairperson’s Lecture to make an important intervention in the education and training arena, and this year was no different. Attendees represented the broad NQF community, including professionals, practitioners in trade and occupational fields such as SETA ETQAs and private providers. Round-table discussions and a plenary session provided the opportunity for fertile debate, and the event helped strengthen links between SAQA and these professionals, practitioners and providers.
SQA has a keen appreciation of the importance of career guidance, and has launched an initiative to create better awareness of this field. Patricia Flederman, an educational consultant, was engaged to research the current state of career guidance and interviewed approximately 50 people from various strata in the education and training sector. Her research culminated in a consultative meeting held at SAQA on 4 September 2008. The agenda included group work, presentations and discussion sessions.

Twenty people participated and provided comprehensive input. It became clear that learners, workers and work-seekers do not have the navigational tools they need to negotiate the maze of learning systems. The answer is to create a career guidance mechanism, which will help to reduce the numbers of people who drop out of the employment pool, or who find they and their job are a mismatch and start again in a different field. Such a mechanism would also help to minimise the wasteful expenditure and disappointment that result from poor career choices. The benefit to the labour sector and to the economy is also obvious.

Another point that emerged is that many people who offer career guidance lack the necessary skills, making it virtually mandatory to set up training programmes. The topics covered in Life Orientation at school level are far from adequate; the ideal is to provide a career guidance service that has a significant impact on learners, students and workers in their pursuit of lifelong learning. More stakeholders need to work towards achieving this.

A further concern was that career guidance in rural areas is virtually nonexistent, resulting in high dropout and unemployment rates. This means that poverty alleviation targets are not met. The disabled also need to be offered better career guidance.
Researching Work and Learning

The participants discussed the possibility of setting up a cellphone helpline and how this could help clients. Such a helpline would need to work synergistically with existing helplines to keep costs down and streamline service delivery.

As SAQA covers general and further education, higher education and workplace learning, it clearly has a role to play as a catalyst in the career guidance arena. Further discussions were held in September and October 2008 with career guidance expert Professor Tony Watts of the UK, who visited South Africa to deliver the annual Chairperson’s Lecture.
Professor Knud Illeris describes workplace learning as “an integrated model between the learner, educational institution and working environment”. This international expert, who has led thought-provoking debate among delegates at various forums around the world, was the keynote speaker at the 2008 NQF Colloquium. This initiative, driven jointly by SAQA, INSETA and UWC, aimed at providing clarity on this diverse and challenging topic.

Although colossal investments are made in workplace learning, there is still a considerable dearth of skills. Some of the issues discussed at the Colloquium were:

- Are companies getting value for money by investing in the education of employees?
- Do employees spend learning time constructively?
- Is the learning that takes place relevant to the organisation?

Aimed primarily at academics, the Colloquium nevertheless yielded attendance figures of 210. Prof. Ian Moll of Wits University, who is a SAQA research associate, responded to Prof. Illeris, and the plenary discussion that followed yielded a stimulating cross-pollination of ideas.

The breakfast event in Pretoria saw attendance figures of 135, comprising key individuals in industry, particularly from the insurance sector, and was characterised by intense debate about workplace learning.

Delegates produced sound ideas and possible interventions that could streamline ‘learning in the workplace’ initiatives, which will eventually translate to an efficient workforce in the country.

The seminar in Cape Town was attended by approximately 80 delegates, who engaged with Prof. Illeris on the issue of learning in and for work.
An opportunity to gain valuable work experience while studying towards a Unisa Certificate in Datametrics – this is what a learnership in the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD) at SAQA offers a lucky few.

The eight young people currently registered for the information administration learnership in the NLRD are the third group to pass through this directorate of SAQA. The programme began in 2003 with 10 learners recruited by a personnel agency, five of whom gained the NQF Level 5 Certificate.

Through a unique collaboration with SAQA, this Unisa qualification is available to SAQA learners over two years instead of the usual three. The 10 modules include business communication, statistics, operations research and computer modelling, and learners must submit all assignments and pass Unisa exams.

In 2005 the second group of learners was recruited by SAQA, which wanted a smaller group of highly-motivated people. A selection process was developed, consisting of a computer literacy test and an interview to establish the applicant’s personal qualities. Applicants also have to fulfill Unisa’s entrance requirements for the Certificate in Datametrics.

Five of the eight people in this group obtained the Certificate in 2007.

The selection process is continually being refined, with the result that all eight learners in the present group, who began in 2007, are currently on track to complete the Certificate in February 2009.

The learners sign a formal contract with SAQA and pay penalties if they leave before the end of the learnership.

Learners have gone on to work as SAP consultants and for prestigious firms like Octoplus. Three learners from the group of 2003, and one from the group of 2005, are now part of the NLRD staff.

Coming to fruition

The learners are a diverse group with varied experience. They are managed by Carina Oelofsen, now the Data Quality Coordinator of the NLRD.

Carina wears two hats. She not only manages the capturing and registration of qualifications, unit standards, providers and accreditation, but assists with recruitment and handles training and management of the learnership programme.

Carina is currently studying towards a BSc in IT Management, thanks again to SAQA which has given her a study loan. The 10 credits that make up her Certificate in Datametrics fulfill one-third of the requirements for her BSc.
Information systems and online learning

Mamotse Mangwane, the NLRD’s secretary, worked as a data capturer before her learnership and studied part-time towards her BComm. She put these studies on hold while completing the Certificate, and has now combined her existing BComm and Certificate credits towards a BComm degree in Informatics.

“I love working with clients, and Nadina Coetzee [CEEQ’s Deputy Director] has been a wonderful mentor. She has such a vision for CEEQ and that inspires me.”

The learnership taught me how to be proactive and manage my time to cope with work and study. I’m confident I can be both a student and an entrepreneur in 2009.”

Lerato Zondo was part of the group that began in 2005. She had already obtained some credits towards a BComm degree when she decided to apply for various learnerships. She was offered several, but chose SAQA because it offered her a better-quality qualification and work experience. Lerato works mainly with data input and cleaning. When she finishes her learnership, she may pursue her interest in economics, business studies and project management by completing her BComm through Unisa.

“I’ve grown my skills with SAQA – I’ve organised systems, trained new staff, mentored learners and worked on the enquiries desk. The varied experience means I’m never bored.”

Ayanda Motukisi has a Diploma in Somatology from Pretoria Technikon and was working at Telkom’s call centre when she was recruited for the first group of learners at SAQA in 2003. However, she soon realised that IT was not her métier and that she wanted to work with people. After a spell as a recruitment consultant, she found herself back at SAQA in the CEEQ call centre and hasn’t looked back. She has been promoted to supervisor and is aiming for a management post.

The seedlings

The learnership taught me how to be proactive and manage my time to cope with work and study. I’m confident I can be both a student and an entrepreneur in 2009.”

James (‘Oupa’) Mponda studied computer science and informatics at university until finances forced him to drop out. (In fact, a lack of funds cut short a promising university career for many of the learners.) Oupa looked for a learnership with links to his computer studies and found the programme at SAQA. After he completes the Certificate in Datametrics early in 2009, he will use the rest of the year to complete his degree. He’s also planning to set up his own IT business.
Nonhlanhla Dlamini studied science for Matric and has always enjoyed IT. Like the other learners, she enjoys the balance between study and practical work experience that the SAQA learnership offers.

Once she has finished her Certificate she is considering a career as a data analyst, and is aiming for a Master’s degree in this field eventually.

Percy Mashaba took a bridging course after Matric and improved his Maths and Science symbols. He then began a four-year IT Diploma, but switched to the SAQA learnership for its balance between practical experience and study. He struggled at first to adapt to distance education, but credits the support he received from NLRD Director Yvonne Shapiro and Carina Oelofsen for his success.

Lucky Sibonyoni studied Mathematical Sciences at UCT after leaving school, but after first year he applied for the SAQA learnership, attracted like Percy by the chance to earn while studying. When he has the Certificate under his belt he plans to study towards a BSc in Computer Science through Unisa and work in IT in Pretoria.

Veronica Vuma is the ‘senior’ learner in terms of work experience. After leaving school Veronica worked as a doctor’s receptionist for several years and established her family. But she kept looking for an opportunity to study further, and eventually spotted the SAQA learnership with the NLRD. During her time at SAQA she has amassed certificates in several skills such as MS Office and reception work in addition to her main studies towards the Certificate in Datametrics. In 2009 she plans to register at Unisa for a BSc in Informatics or Information Systems.
Portia Manaiwa completed one and a half years of her studies in Computer Systems Engineering at Wits Technikon before the money ran out. But the SAQA learnership suited her interests and she is enjoying the independence and responsibility it gives her. Database management is her great love, and she is considering studying part-time towards a BSc in Information Technology in 2009.

Lazarus Sekopa from Limpopo found himself far from home when he enrolled for Electrical Engineering at UCT in 2006. However, since starting the SAQA learnership in 2007 he has realised that he enjoys data analysis and programming, and he’ll pursue this interest in 2009 by transferring his Certificate credits towards a BSc degree in computational statistics.

Lati Molatelo is the only one of the group who joined the learnership programme straight after school. She dreamed of studying architecture, but when she saw an advert for the SAQA learnership she realised it offered her a very different but valuable opportunity. The change from school to part-time study was something of a shock, but Lati learned fast how to manage her time.

“I’m from a small town, and the SAQA learnership and living in Pretoria have provided masses of new experiences!”

“Everyone at SAQA is so helpful - they really encourage and inspire you to develop yourself.”

“In 2009 I’ll find a job first, and then decide what IT stream to study further when I’ve had a few months’ experience.”
Through the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD), SAQA provides a service verifying South African qualifications. This enables clients to check that their qualifications have been loaded onto the NLRD, and third parties can verify that people actually do hold the qualifications they claim to have.

Employers, employment agencies and anyone else wishing to do third-party verifications have to subscribe to the verification service, but the service is free to individuals who want to verify their own qualifications.

**Individual verification**

Verifying a qualification is simple. Just send an e-mail request with the person’s full names (including previous surname if applicable) and ID number to verifications@saqa.org.za. The NLRD will provide a transcript of the person’s completed qualifications and any unit standards/courses they have passed, as recorded in the database (see below).

The transcript gives the person’s name and ID number, the transcript date and the NLRD person ID (this number does not change and is unique in the database, much like an ID number).

The transcript is NOT a certificate. This is stated immediately after the personal details and also in a watermark across the page.

The transcript shows:

- Name of qualification and SAQA Qualification ID
- NQF Level of the qualification and provider of the qualification
- Status (enrolled or achieved), enrolment date and achievement date
- The enrolments and achievements of unit standards or courses recorded against that qualification

The NLRD also records unit standards and courses that have been obtained independently of qualifications. If present, these appear at the end of the transcript.
Checks by clients

To subscribe to the service, potential clients should e-mail the NLRD on verifications@saqa.org.za. Once they have subscribed, they must provide certain information on the person whose qualifications they are checking: full names and ID number, name of the qualification being checked, the year it was completed and the name of the institution or training provider.

The NLRD will only confirm whether or not the qualification was found in the database. It’s important to note that if a qualification is not on the database this does not necessarily indicate fraud. The data for that year and that provider may simply not yet be on the NLRD. Learner transcripts are not given to clients.

What is currently on the database

SAQA’s aim is to have every South African qualification of every learner recorded in the NLRD. To date, the database contains information on

- South African university achievements up to 2004 (2005-6 will be available soon)
- South African technikon achievements from 1999 to 2004
- Achievements logged by all the SETAs and ETQAs except the HPCSA

Short courses are not usually recorded in the NLRD.

The NLRD is updated continually, and SAQA has various projects running to gather and load ‘older’ learner achievement data.

New features of searchable databases on the SAQA website

By Carina Oelofsen, Data Quality Coordinator: National Learners’ Records Database

The searchable databases of qualifications and unit standards, which provide round-the-clock access to information on qualifications, unit standards, provider accreditation and ETQA accreditation, are continually updated to keep them as user-friendly as possible and encourage people to use this national resource. This article describes the enhancements that have been made over the last year.

The searchable database for all qualifications and unit standards

Since clients do not always know the registration status of a qualification or unit standard they are looking for, we have had several requests for a single search page. This has given rise to the ‘Search All’ or ‘Brown’ searchable database, which returns all qualifications and unit standards (regardless of their registration status) that meet the search criteria and are available on any of the other searchable databases.
The registration status of each qualification (or unit standard) is indicated in the summary of the search results, as in this example:

**Trades**

The list of trades has also been added to the searchable databases.

**ABET Band search**

Clients can now search for a specific ABET Band, for both qualifications and unit standards, by selecting the ABET Band from a drop-down list.

The search results also include the ABET Band (whether or not this was used as a search criterion):

**Train-out and transition period**

The train-out and transition periods in qualifications and unit standards on the NLRD have now been included on the database. This means that two related fields in the detail of each qualification and unit standard, the last date for enrolment and last date for achievement, are now available:

Giving users the exact final dates for enrolment and achievement means they can make more accurate decisions, more promptly.

**Replacements**

When a qualification (or unit standard) replaces an older version (or has been replaced by a revised version), the replacement is now shown in a table below the qualification or unit standard header:
If a qualification or unit standard has not yet been replaced (or does not yet replace anything), the following statement is displayed instead:

This qualification does not replace any other qualification and is not replaced by any other qualification.

(In the case of a unit standard, the statement would, of course, refer to 'unit standard'.)

ETQA of a replaced qualification
When a qualification has been allocated to an ETQA, but has since been replaced by a revised qualification, the ETQA field shows the ETQA quality-assured qualification until it was replaced:

Another example shows how one Learning Programme has been replaced by another:

As always, the NLRD directorate wants to provide its clients with a useful environment. We therefore encourage our users to tell us about any problems they experience, and also to suggest potentially useful features that could be added, by e-mailing quals_stds@saqa.org.za

We aim to maintain the NQF’s objectives by ensuring quality access to qualifications, unit standards and related information.

It’s full steam ahead for the NQF Support Link
By Tumelo Modisane, Assistant Director: Information Services

The delivery of the NQF Support Link modules has gained momentum this year and this has been propelled in part by the move from the two-day workshop to the three-day workshop.

The move is in response to learner needs. To date 14 three-day workshops have taken place.

Ntsiki Gumbe, Deputy Director: Information Services (left) and Barbara Dale-Jones.
“Although the NQF Support Link workshops have been widely appreciated and enjoyed, many participants report difficulty in completing their Portfolios of Evidence (PoEs) owing to the demands of their working lives,” says Barbara Dale-Jones, General Manager at eDegree.

eDegree is the accredited training provider offering the NQF Support Link modules. Ms Dale-Jones says the motivation to increase the duration of NQF Support Link workshops to three days was prompted by the low submission rate of PoEs. “A third day will allow learners the opportunity to compile their PoEs and consolidate the first two days of their training,” she said.

Learners are happy with the extra day. “The third day allowed me to work on my portfolio while it was still fresh in my mind,” said a learner who attended a recent workshop.

A one-day PoE workshop has also been introduced for learners who have already attended the two-day workshops. In this workshop, under the guidance of a facilitator, they will receive templates and guidelines on putting together a PoE.

Other developments to the NQF Support Link include the completion of the much-awaited module on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Module 7. The module outlines the
Information systems and online learning

Key defining features of RPL as a theory and a practice. It is aimed at those operating at a strategic, systems and managerial level of understanding and implementation of RPL.

The module serves as a useful introduction to RPL for any practitioner, and facilitates the path towards the regulatory environment impacting on RPL in South Africa. Learners will gain an understanding of the various elements required in the design and implementation of an RPL project.

They will also be able to develop RPL policies, procedures and plans for their organisations; provide RPL advice and support; and promote RPL practices.

Other developments include the NQF Implementation Toolkits. These provide practical tools for the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of learning and skills development processes.

The tools include step-by-step descriptions of processes, templates, flowcharts and practical guidelines that will assist people working with the NQF to translate the framework’s intent and principles into learning programmes and processes.
Dr James Keevy, Deputy Director: International Liaison, attended the 5th Pan-Commonwealth conference in London in July. The conference, held at the University of London, was organised by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) with additional sponsorship from Britain’s Open University and Department of International Development. The theme was Access to learning for development.

Four topics were addressed: children and young people, governance, conflict and social justice, health and livelihoods. Sir John Daniel, the CEO of COL, co-chaired the conference with Sir Graeme Davies, Vice-Chancellor of the University of London. Plenary speakers included Barney Pityana, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Unisa; Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations; and Brenda Gourley, Vice-Chancellor of the Open University and previously Vice-Chancellor of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. There were 729 delegates from 70 countries.

Dr Keevy co-presented a paper entitled Wiki standards and qualifications frameworks with Dr Paul West of COL. The paper argued the position both for and against ‘open’ qualifications standards – those posted on a website by individuals, and edited and updated by other individuals – as opposed to standards developed solely by expert practitioners within specific communities of practice.
Commonwealth of Learning

SAQA expertise helps the Virtual University of Small States of the Commonwealth

SAQA has recently developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework for the VUSSC (see the article on ‘Degree Mills’ on page 22). Sir John Daniel, CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning, and senior officials from various small states acknowledged SAQA’s important contribution during a plenary session.

This is how Sir John explained the need for a Transnational Qualifications Framework:

When the Ministers conceived the VUSSC they wanted to launch their countries into the e-world and to have them acquire the skills necessary to look larger countries in the eye as equals in their mastery of eLearning and online education.

The proof of that mastery is not only the ability to put electronic learning materials in a repository, but more importantly the know-how to get them out again and into the hands of students, whether studying in classrooms or learning at a distance.

For that to happen it is not enough for the eLearning materials to be attractive and well designed.

They must fit seamlessly into the curricula and programmes that your tertiary institutions are offering so that students can receive credit and awards in the normal way.

Hence our decision to begin work on a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) that we hoped would facilitate the adoption and use of VUSSC programmes of study in all countries, thus supporting institutions in their wish to offer online qualifications internally. This should contribute usefully to the general development of education in the small states.

You know better than we do whether that aim is being achieved.

We must confess that when we started work on the TQF we had no idea just how timely the idea of a qualification framework was.

When we wrote to Ministers last year asking them to send us their national qualifications frameworks we expected only a trickle of replies.

Instead we have not only had replies from most countries, but those replies have shown us that qualifications frameworks are a live issue for many countries.

The TQF is a comparison and transfer mechanism that is being created by the small states of the Commonwealth. It comprises a ten-level system that will act as an enabling mechanism between national and regional qualifications systems.

A TQF Management Committee has been established to work through the fine details of the framework and the process that will be followed.

Courses and programmes that satisfy the requirements of national and regional qualifications authorities will be submitted for listing on a VUSSC-TQF website that is to be created in late 2008.

Prospective learners will be able to determine the accreditation status of online courses offered by consulting this website.

(from an address to a meeting of government representatives and educators, Singapore, February 2008)
Open and distance learning (ODL) is a favourite mode of operation for spurious providers of education, commonly referred to as ‘degree mills’. These bogus colleges are multiplying in response to the exploding demand for higher education in the developing world. Unfortunately, a number of small Commonwealth countries are considered to be safe havens for operators of these disreputable operations. This poses a serious risk to the expansion of genuine tertiary education, especially in those small states thought to provide cover for degree mills.

When a country gains a reputation for hosting degree mills it risks being put on informal blacklists; governments and bona fide institutions in other countries may refuse to accept any educational qualification from the blacklisted country. Furthermore, because bogus degrees are usually offered over the Internet, some jurisdictions have imposed an outright ban on the recognition of any online degrees.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is making excellent progress, but to take advantage of the explosion of tertiary provision that it offers, the small states must shed any links with degree mills. One purpose of the Transnational Qualifications Framework that is being prepared for the VUSSC is to help establish the credibility as well as the transferability of programmes developed through this collaborative network.

Degree mills also pose a threat to personal and national security. People with phony medical degrees cause serious harm by acting as doctors. Terrorists and criminals try to gain illegal entry to countries using fake degrees to obtain skilled-worker visas.

Governments, institutions and employers must work together to curb degree mills and protect the credibility of legitimate educational institutions. The Commonwealth of Learning is working with other bodies, including UNESCO and the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), to promote the following actions:

- Work with the small states of the Commonwealth in drafting legislation and putting in place accreditation procedures so that degree mills can be readily identified.
- Put the issue of degree mills on the agendas of international meetings of education ministers.
- Encourage international agencies to toughen their procedures for protecting misuse of their name (bogus operations often claim a spurious accreditation relationship with groups such as COL, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation).
- Create a ‘whitelist’ of accredited institutions (UNESCO is working on a web portal for this purpose).
- Strengthen quality assurance and accreditation.
- Encourage employers, academic admissions officers and immigration authorities to check the authenticity of all credentials presented to them.

[This editorial first appeared in Connections Vol 13(2), June 2008.]
On 12 April 2007, SAQA was honoured to host representatives of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) based in Vancouver, Canada. Messrs Wayne Macintosh and Paul West were at SAQA for the formal signing of a Joint Implementation Plan (JIP) between COL and SAQA for the development of computing standards that would underpin a Commonwealth Computer Navigation Certificate (CCNC).

The COL project aims to provide access to high-quality e-learning material free of charge and to provide a basis for reflection on how e-learning across continents could be supported by qualification frameworks.

SAQA’s Information Technology Standards Generating Body, supported by the ISETT SETA, has already developed and registered a number of unit standards in End-User Computing (EUC) in response to a very high demand from industry and the IT sector. The standards ranged from Levels 1 to 4 of the South African NQF, covering a wide range of IT knowledge areas in business use.

In response to the aims of the JIP for a CCNC, an initial scoping and research into the content of the proposed CCNC qualification was undertaken. Its purpose was to determine the scope of the project and ensure the qualification would not duplicate the existing EUC qualification. The research revealed that, in terms of CCNC content to be developed, the qualification would be equivalent to the popular but costly International Computers Driving Licence.

Fortuitously, through a rigorous mapping exercise, the registered EUC qualification was found to cover all the modules identified as content for the CCNC. These were:

- Concepts of IT
- Using the computer and managing files
- Word-processing
- Databases
- Presentations
- Spreadsheets
- Information and communication

As an illustration of the quality of the SAQA content and process, this was a boost for morale as it positioned SAQA as a leading and preferred partner for international collaboration.

The SAQA standards were adopted by the COL and are currently available on their learning framework in the Wiki system.

Dr Sharma Bhikha, former Director of Standards Setting at SAQA, said, “This commendable success is due to our partnership model, which enables a wide network of people in our operations to benefit, thereby giving effect to the wise words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: ‘Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world’.”

SAQA continues to partner key stakeholders nationally and internationally in the development of fit-for-purpose, relevant and responsive educational and training standards for local and international social upliftment.
One of the main functions of the NQF is to integrate all elements of the education and training system. This may sound simple, but its practical implementation is very complex. To achieve this integration, the NQF must first identify, as precisely as possible, the knowledge and skills requirements of a particular sector, and then provide qualifications that satisfy these needs.

Since 2003, hard work and extensive research have gone into developing a qualification framework for the ITC sector. This framework had to achieve two objectives: address the sector’s specific skills needs and ensure that the NQF objectives specified in the SAQA Act were met. The ISETT SETA, in partnership with SAQA, worked on a qualification framework that would define all the qualifications requirements and map them to the NQF levels. The framework was finalised within 12 months of initiation.

This framework makes qualification generation easy across the whole sector. In addition, with this framework the learner-ship development required for South Africa’s human resource capacity in the ICT arena is easily achievable.

Developers had to take into account the SAQA Act, the Skills Development Act, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa, the National Skills Development Strategy, the South African ICT Sector Development Framework (SAITIS) from the Department of Trade and Industry and the ISETT SETA’s economic sector skills plan.

The scope of the ICT framework is the same as the scope of the ISETT sector, as defined in Government Gazette No. 20192 of 11 June 1999. It recognises that a flexible and well-understood method for continued education relating to ICT is essential, including matches to career paths and quality-assured qualifications. Furthermore, the qualifications generated within this framework meet the NQF registration requirements set out by SAQA.

There are certain underlying principles that govern this and any other qualifications framework. A framework must make it possible for people to progress in their careers within and across sectors, and retain their credits. It must drive learning and knowledge based on people’s actual activities. It must create a correlation between the worlds of work and academia that allows changes in skills requirements and technology over time.

A framework must also cater for both individual choices and company/organisational choices.

The ITC framework consists of all the functions that define the ICT sector, as well as the knowledge and skills requirements that would enable these functions. It is designed as an enabling tool that helps learners choose and combine appropriate knowledge into recognised qualifications within the ITC sector.

The design of the ICT framework is broadly based on the British Computer Society Industry Structure Model, but...
many different IT structure models were researched. Examples are the ICCP and ACM models in the US, the Canadian Software Human Resource Council Occupational Skills Profile Model (OSPM), the E-Skills National Training Organisation, current industry-generated standards from IBM and CS Holdings, and many short courses offered by various providers.

The NQF and ICT qualifications
ICT qualifications on the NQF fall within Organising Field 10 (Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences) and Organising Field 6 (Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology).

The ICT framework was devised to cover IT qualifications initially, and will later be expanded to include telecommunications qualifications.

The ISETT SETA will use the framework to formulate the qualifications needed in a form that will be readily recognised by the intended audience in the ICT sector.

The developers consulted as many ICT stakeholders as possible to ensure that the functions and competencies defined within the framework were acceptable and similar to industry-defined functions and competencies.

To ensure its integrity as a public document as well as its public acceptability, the framework was published in both the Government Gazette and the websites of SAQA and the ISETT SETA towards the end of 2007.

The ISETT SETA has ongoing responsibilities for the framework. It must:

- update the framework as and when necessary to reflect the dynamic nature of the sector.
- register learnerships on demand from any part of the sector (IT suppliers and/or users).
- aggregate learnerships into qualifications, and skills programmes into learnerships, with ease.
- register prioritised skills programmes.
- develop qualifications and unit standards on request.

SAQA's responsibilities are to ensure that the framework complies with the NQF, and that qualifications and unit standards produced with the aid of the framework comply with NQF requirements.

SAQA must also develop the capacity of task teams of subject experts to use the framework for qualification and standards generation.

Finally, SAQA must ensure that ICT qualifications are generated in line with the framework, and that all ICT qualifications registered on the NQF are reflected on the ICT framework.

Judging by comments received from different corners of the sector, it is already apparent that the ICT framework of qualifications and standards is a success, placing South Africa at the forefront of developments in framework conceptualisation and design.

This speaks volumes for a collaborative mode of working that produces quality and stakeholder buy-in.

For the country, a precedent worth emulating in other sectors has been set. It is indeed a massive breakthrough in terms of sector skills definition and facilitation of qualifications generation.
Research imprint

In memoriam: Professor Ben Parker

By Dr James Keevy, Deputy Director: International Liaison

SAQA is deeply saddened by the passing of our colleague Professor Ben Parker. He will be sorely missed by all his colleagues and we would like to express our condolences to his family and friends.

Ben Parker was the Director of Research at SAQA and a visiting Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Prior to this he was a senior researcher at the Centre for Education Policy Development, executive Dean of Education at the University of Fort Hare, Professor of Ethics and Professor and Head of the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. During 1999 and 2000 he was seconded to the national Department of Education in the position of Director: Higher Education Colleges and Teacher Education Programmes where he assisted with the development of the Norms and Standards for Educators and the incorporation of colleges of education into higher education. In 2001 and 2002, he served as a member of the Ministerial Study Team to review the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. In 2004 and 2005, he was chairperson of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education.

Ben was approached by SAQA to join the organisation in November 2006. At that stage in his career, Ben had already achieved more than most, significantly contributing to wide-ranging conceptual and policy developments as South Africa started to free itself from the tentacles of apartheid. While a number of other offers were undoubtedly lying on his table at the time, and even though the research position at SAQA would require relocation, and more importantly, also pose a range of challenges to his thinking, Ben accepted the offer.

Directly as a result of Ben's appointment, SAQA was offered the opportunity to engage directly and substantially with the diverse positions taken by both critics and supporters of the South African NQF. True to his nature, Ben wasted no time in engaging with NQF stakeholders, including SAQA management, SAQA staff and the SAQA Board. His approach was to develop sustainable long-term research projects in partnership with established research institutions – an approach that was contrary to that normally followed in government and parastatals, and which required continued effort and vision from his side to realise. Through his perseverance Ben was able to create a 'research space' within SAQA that allowed him and the staff of the now expanding Research Directorate to initiate a number of long-term research projects, including those with Rhodes, Wits, UWC, and more recently with JET and UKZN.

This unfolding research agenda has become the envy of many in the academic field, and SAQA is committed to further develop these projects in the years to come. Ben's contribution to his country on a number of levels, be it teacher education, higher education or the NQF, has come at a price. As South Africans we need to take note of the immense pressures placed on a select few – building a new and sustainable democracy requires us to draw out capacity on a much broader platform.

To Ben's family, friends and colleagues we can say unequivocally: you can stand proud, as the impact of Ben's work will be evident in South Africa for many years to come.

We salute you, Ben. Rest in peace.
SAQA was established in mid-1996, tasked with the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). By 2001 an external review was set up to look into implementation issues, and as a result a new NQF Bill (2008) was put forward to replace the 1995 SAQA Act. This Bill repeals the SAQA Act, establishes three sub-frameworks to oversee different sectors of education and training and provides a new role for SAQA as the NQF apex organisation.

One of SAQA’s functions with respect to research, as highlighted in the Bill, is to “conduct or commission investigations on issues of importance to the development and implementation of the NQF, including periodic studies of the impact of the NQF on South African education, training and employment”.

The description of SAQA as the NQF apex organisation implies an increasingly research-driven approach to NQF development. SAQA will have to play a knowledge-based leadership, development and support role that nurtures a collaborative approach between the key roleplayers. It can do this by providing rigorous research that informs and clarifies policies and practices in ways that add value to the efficiency and effectiveness of the NQF.

Given the increasing importance of research, monitoring and evaluation as part of SAQA’s emerging apex organisational role, the research function was separated from the Directorate: Strategic Support and formally established on 1 September 2007 as a stand-alone directorate. The late Professor Ben Parker was appointed Director, with Dr Jeffy Mukora as Deputy Director.

There is a full-time research assistant (Esther Manabile) and an Administrative Officer (Charmaine Lebooa).

The vision of the directorate’s research agenda is to balance short-term research projects with longer-term research programmes; it is oriented towards partnerships...
with experts and organisations in different fields. There are two main rationales for this partnership model. Firstly, rigorous research that has credibility is best done by organisations that are research-driven, with strong research cultures and traditions – such as universities and research institutions.

Secondly, achieving an appropriate equity profile is a long-term development process whereby SAQA grows its own capacity through employing and developing research assistants who will become senior researchers. Esther Manabile, our research assistant, is currently undergoing this process.

One of the challenges facing SAQA in its new role is the establishment of clear pathways to link the three sub-frameworks, though it is not yet clear exactly how this should be done.

At the heart of all education and training lies knowledge and learning. If SAQA is to fulfill its mandate of facilitating a system of collaboration in order to achieve the objectives of the NQF, there is a need to “… understand the different forms of knowing and learning which are embedded in dif-
Different frameworks and the differences in assessment in the educational and occupational areas” (Parker, cited in Education in South Africa 2008, www.succeed.co.za, pg. 35).

Most South African educational research to date has focused on formal education settings (and the knowledge and learning of the Higher Education and schooling sectors), and few education faculties have researched the relationships between work and learning. SAQA therefore established a partnership model with a number of universities, to develop a deeper understanding of ‘work and learning’.

The wider purpose of this programme is to examine how different forms of knowing, learning and assessment are embedded in the occupational sector, so as to inform policies, standards and quality in the NQF.

A research partnership approach in a changing context

Within the context of the imminent changes brought about by the Bill, a SAQA partnership model is being developed with specific research programmes located in different universities. Currently, there are partnership projects with three universities: Wits, Rhodes and the University of the Western Cape.

The Wits School of Education, through Professor Ian Moll, is focusing on a ‘communities of practice’ approach to forms of learning and assessment and to organisational forms relevant to SAQA and NQF processes (especially the concepts of assessment, transparency and transferability). Rhodes University’s Environmental Education and Sustainability Unit is investigating the dynamics of change-oriented workplace learning processes within the wider national and global trajectory of sustainable development. The project is headed by Professor Heila Lotz-Sisitka.

The University of the Western Cape, through its RPL programme, is undertaking a comparative study of RPL practices in formal education and occupational contexts in South Africa. Allan Ralphs is currently working on the proposal.

SAQA and its partners held their first workshop at Rhodes University on 7-8 August 2008. The partners presented their work and prepared the ground for the Colloquium on researching work and learning which was held on 25 August 2008 at UWC.

This is in preparation for the Denmark 2009 Researching Work and Learning Conference.
The sculpture *The Dance of Learning* was unveiled and the Annual Report was launched at a gala event held on 17 September at the Association of the Arts Gallery in Pretoria. The Director of the Arts Association, Pieter van Heerden, welcomed guests and gave them an overview of his organisation.

The event itself encompassed elements of participation, erosion of barriers and “collective creativity”. Guests arrived to the sounds of Melodi Ya Batsha Chamber Orchestra – five young performers on violin, trombone and cello, whose music is in the tradition of the Soweto String Quartet.

The Director-General of Education, Duncan Hindle, performed the unveiling ceremony. Also present were the sculptor, Orlando de Almeida, and the SAQA Board Chairperson, Professor Shirley Walters. In his speech, Director-General Hindle pointed out: “The philosophy behind this sculpture is how SAQA and its different partners are involved in the dance of learning. Dancing in tune with each other is imperative, given the advent of the NQF Bill. It is most encouraging to note that the Authority is adopting an optimistic outlook on the changes spelt out by the Bill. The sculpture depicts fluidity, graceful movement and harmony. This represents how SAQA deals with change as well as demonstrating a genuine commitment to learning within the education and training sector. This initiative echoes the organisation’s proud record over the past 12 years, and especially how it has worked synergistically with my Department and the sector in general.”

Hindle took the dance metaphor further when he equated dance to the harmonious relationship between SAQA and his Department. “If we talk in terms of dance, then we at the Department are also engaged in a constant jig of some sort: language, curriculum, learner welfare, violence at schools, and other such jives, if one prefers a somewhat contemporary term. However, no matter what the dance, we are pleased to have a fine dance partner such as SAQA, which seems to be always ‘in synch’ with us. And need I remind you – to take the metaphor further – that on a huge dance floor with a cacophony of tunes, the right partner can do wonders. So SAQA, let’s dance on!”

The second component of the evening was the launch of the Annual Report by Professor Walters. Interpreting the concept of community dancing, Prof. Walters got guests involved in an almost choreographed ritual as part of the launch.

The formalities of the evening were complemented by poet Malika Ndlovu, whose words were accompanied by African
drums. Her powerful lines, specially commissioned for the occasion, had guests enthralled.

During the informal part of the evening guests visited the gallery’s exhibits, representing a range of South African artists, and networked over food and wine. For those with temerity and a spirit of adventure, there was some fine communal dancing to the keyboards and vocals of Roz Griffin and Karl Haese.

Enter this circle of seven
Dancing mirror to our nation
Learning through living
Teaching through being
Lifelong journeying
In the heart of the circle
Of us all
Lives the dream
We are still
Dreaming
Harnessing
Our energies, our hopes
Toward the harmony
We struggled, suffered for
Twisted architecture
Of our past
Undergoing alchemy
Moulded by the fire
Of our history
We are collapsing pillars
Of division
Folding into
Each other’s territories
Liberating
The river of our healing creativity
Mapping
A fusion of our talents, our resources
Calling
For the alignment of our purposes
Through this collective choreography
We dance this dream
Into being
Moving
In unison
Listening
To the greatest teacher of all
Life itself
Echoing
The simplest of lessons
The beauty of we
Cannot exist without you or I
Time continues
To test our thresholds
Of resistance
Affirming
The depths of our resilience
African phoenix
We emerge and soar
Shadows of our ancestors
Witnesses
Above our heads
Beneath our feet
We are beating the same earth
Embracing the same sky
Our voices rise in resonance
Together
Only together
We fly
Fly
Enter this circle of seven
Dancing mirror to our nation
Learning through living
Teaching through being
Lifelong journeying
SAQA came into being as a result of the SAQA Act No.58 of 1995. Together with the ETQA Regulation R1127 of September 1998, this Act provides an enabling and regulatory framework for the implementation of the quality assurance systems and processes required by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

When it was established in 1995, SAQA's responsibility was to assure the quality of education and training in South Africa. This mandate includes the external quality auditing of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). For this purpose SAQA appoints external lead auditors whose names have been published in the Government Gazette.

Audits in the first cycle, which was completed in 2004, were compliance-based. Their primary purpose was to establish to what degree the accredited ETQAs met the quality criteria set out in Schedule C of the Procedures for the Monitoring and Auditing of ETQAs. After the audit, SAQA worked with the ETQAs that were not compliant until they met all their legislative requirements. These ETQAs were then re-accredited for the next three-year cycle.

The following cycle of audits was performance-based. Although the focus of this round of auditing was on performance, ETQAs had to maintain the baseline of compliance as a departure point. The process began with research on different models of quality performance auditing in education and training, and the model and tools derived from the research were piloted with six ETQAs in 2006. The quality performance audits started in mid-2007 and were completed in 2008.

Performance audits are intended to establish how well ETQAs fulfil their responsibilities and how well they are focused on the outcomes. The performance audit instrument measures how the implementation of the ETQA processes affects the quality of delivery and the level of client satisfaction, and so it has to be flexible enough to allow for sector specificity without compromising the set quality standards.

Performance auditing focuses on achieving results and not on the number of activities. Before submitting to a performance audit, an ETQA should ensure it has a clear mission and vision, has developed strategies with appropriate action plans and resources, and has implemented these. In addition, the ETQA needs to be sure that its constituency's needs are being addressed, monitored and acted upon. It should measure, review and improve its arrangements to achieve goals and objectives and ensure that its activities advance the objectives of the NQF.

As the first step in the performance auditing process, SAQA sent a self-evaluation questionnaire to all ETQAs. Completing the questionnaire helps ETQAs determine their compliance status. SAQA then evaluated the results to determine each ETQA's level of compliance and whether it was ready for a performance audit. The self-evaluation results influenced the schedule for performance auditing.

A preliminary audit meeting was held before the audit itself to give the ETQA an opportunity to discuss the evidence it intended to present. This evidence must represent the ETQA's performance against all the set criteria of the auditing instrument and must be relevant and applicable to the sector.

Evidence was then submitted to SAQA's audit team, consisting of an external independent lead auditor and two members of SAQA staff. The lead auditor was given three days to conduct a comprehensive desktop study of all submitted evidence files.

The desktop study was followed by a four-day on-site fieldwork session. The fieldwork included a visit to a provider and to a regional office of the ETQA, where applicable, as well as interviews, discussion/dialogue, demonstrations, documentary evidence and an inspection of the facilities.

SAQA evaluated all evidence offered by the ETQA for effectiveness, efficiency and economy. Each criterion was then rated against the rating scale.

This was the first quality performance audit conducted with ETQAs. It has to be kept in mind that it takes time to introduce any new system and that ETQAs have to meet a certain level of maturity.
The performance audits indicated that most ETQAs have moved from just being compliant and have started to operate in a performance mode, although there is still room for improvement.

One of the outcomes of the performance audit is that the ETQAs must create a development plan to address areas of non-performance or under-performance identified in the audit report. SAQA will closely monitor the implementation of these action plans in order to close-out the identified areas.

As ETQAs reach the end of their accreditation period, the regulations require them to provide SAQA with a motivation report outlining their achievements in order for them to be re-accredited.

Given the action plans and motivation reports, SAQA is confident that once re-accredited, ETQAs will further improve their performance in terms of quality education and training within their respective sectors.

Moving from compliance auditing to performance auditing was a giant step forward. The process has added value to the systems, and all ETQAs are on track to becoming quality performing bodies and showing sustained improvement. SAQA plans to release a comprehensive trends report, highlighting areas of best practice and areas that need further improvement.

"The first thing we need to understand about complaints is that they are not bad things," says business motivational guru Richard Mulvey in a recent article on the Bizcommunity website.

He explains that at least a customer with a complaint is speaking to you. “96% of dissatisfied customers do not complain; they simply go elsewhere next time. Of the 4% who do complain, if we handle their complaint well, between 50% and 74% will return. If we solve their problem instantly, however, 97% will return. That means if a customer complains, at least 20 would have complained but couldn’t be bothered. Not only that, if a customer complains and you solve their problem straight away, you are almost guaranteed that they will return to your business in the future.”


The report called for a generic model of good customer care practice. SAQA responded positively by developing a Customer Services Unit, which aims to deal with all complaints effectively, train staff in handling complaints and record and analyse information on complaints received.

The unit’s key function is to promote excellent customer service and provide an accessible entry point for clients from where their calls can be followed up. It uses an electronic system to track and resolve complaints satisfactorily.

Golden rules of customer service

Mulvey identifies some golden rules for dealing with complaints. Like most good advice, this boils down to common sense. Some of the rules are:

- Listen! Quite often just letting the customer talk will be enough to defuse their frustration or anger.
Empathise: If you argue with the customer, you have lost. But the most irate caller will feel less frustrated if his or her feelings are acknowledged. This can be done by simply saying, “Madam (or Sir), if I were in your shoes, I would feel exactly the same way you do.” This is not the same thing as agreeing with the client’s furious accusations, but it immediately makes him or her feel less aggressive.

Take the complaint seriously: You may have had 20 people complaining that day, but the client wants to believe that his or her complaint is the most important thing on your mind right now.

Don’t pass the buck! Whoever takes the call owns the problem, even if they picked up the phone by mistake. Customers hate having to relate their complaint to a number of different people before they find somebody who can fix it.

Write it down: Get all the details, especially the customer’s name and contact details (correctly!).

Do it! Make sure that the issue is resolved within the time scale. Even if you are not personally responsible for fixing the problem, get back to the client at each stage to keep him or her informed about progress.

Janine Lazarus Media Consultancy adopts a similar stance. They suggest that “Today’s technology allows your business to handle more customer service than ever before, but if your team falls short on efficient communication skills, the only thing your organization will derive from all this technology is a questionable ability to serve your customers.

The real essence of effective communication is to be as much yourself as possible. This means not being contrived, too slick, or too brash. It also means being able to present yourself – and your organization – to the best possible advantage.”

SAQA has taken these rules on board with its slogan ‘World-class service is not negotiable at SAQA’.

This means that SAQA’s employees will do everything in their power to achieve greater customer satisfaction and to resolve customer complaints as efficiently as possible.

This is one way of illustrating SAQA’s commitment to providing excellent service.

Since November 2007, 54 complaints originating from phone calls, e-mail, faxes and letters have been logged. All except the two most recent ones have been resolved.

Dance, auditing and customer care

Dimakatso Dingake responds to a client query.
Dance, auditing and customer care

SAQA Exhibitions

National Science Week Secunda 12-16 May

SASCE Durban 19 - 23 May

SASCE Durban 19 - 23 May

HRDA, Gallagher Estate, 4 - 6 June

NPA Expo, Silverton, 19 June

IEB Conference, Birchwood, 9 July

Pan African TVET Conference, BMW Pavilion, Waterfront, Cape Town, 19-22 August

Emlyn Jordaan, Assistant Director: Events Management, at the SAQA stand
The 702 Walk the Talk has yielded tremendous interest from SAQA staff members over the past two years. 2008 saw renewed interest, resulting in SAQA earmarking the event as an annual occurrence. While some staff members opted to ‘strut their stuff’ for 5km, the more daring ones chose the 8km event. After the enjoyable (though sometimes gruelling) walk, the 83 SAQA participants enjoyed refreshments, chatted to colleagues and their families and revelled in good company. The event also doubled as a marketing/PR campaign. SAQA publications were distributed and banners were prominently displayed.

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This year’s event was attended by almost 50 000 people.

SAQA’s marquee – rest, relaxation and hospitality

Nolufefe Mpulwana, Lucitia Selokela and Nomfundo Parkies still full of energy at the end of their 8km walk.

Shandukani Manyaka and Phuti Semenya looking forward to the start.

Joe Samuels at the finishing post.

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