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Vocational vs Occupational Qualifications?

Is there a difference, and does it
make a difference?

2018 SAQA Chairperson's Lecture

Volker Wedekind



- Introduction
- The Problem
 - Vocational, occupational, technical, professional and three streams
 - Levels, bands and sub-frameworks
- A Question of Definition
- International Usage
 - The VET System
 - Naming Qualifications
 - Resonating Distinctions
- South Africa's Terminological Development
- Taking Stock
- Towards a Conclusion
 - System Boundaries
 - Understanding Work
 - Qualifications
 - Institutions



- In SA we have a number of different terms that we use for talking about qualifications that are designed to prepare the students, learners, employees, workers for work.
 - These are part of what is defined elsewhere as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system
“Education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly in the labour market” (Cedefop 2017)
 - VET qualifications are in different parts of the SA education and training
 - They are referred to in legislation and policy but not consistently
 - Consequently, they are treated differently

What are these labels?



- **Vocational Qualifications**

- Usually offered at education institutions such as TVET colleges, Universities of Technology and private institutions
- Examples include various National Certificates (Vocational) (NCV) and the National Technical Education Diploma (NATED)(N1-6)
- The above are both directly funded from the fiscus



- **Occupational Qualifications**

- Range of qualifications, part-qualifications, programmes, courses and unit standards
- Defined in legislation – Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998
‘Occupational Qualification’ means a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession resulting from work-based learning and consisting of knowledge unit standards, practical unit standards and work experience unit standards.
- Associated with Qualifications Council of Trades and Occupations (QCTO)
- The above are not funded from the fiscus

The term ‘occupation’ is also used more broadly, such as in the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO)



- **Technical Qualifications**

- Term linked formally or informally with certain qualifications e.g. NATED and three stream model
- Historical usage goes back over 100 years
 - Industrialisation
- Term also used in the name of colleges
- Not clear what it means
 - What is technical in 21st Century?
 - Associated with intermediate level of skill
 - Are technical qualifications a sub category of vocational and occupational



- **Department of Basic Education Three Stream Model**
 - Proposal has complicated the terminology
 - Uses ‘vocational’ and ‘occupational’ and ‘technical & vocational’ and ‘technical occupational’ in different versions alongside ‘academic’ stream
 - Proposes to introduce three streams at Further Education and Training Levels and 25 Skills and Vocational Programmes at General Education and Training levels
 - Differences in streams are mainly about audience, but also outcome:
 - T&V - ‘mainly for artisanship and professions’; 50% practical
 - TO - ‘preparing learners for the world of work’; 75% practical
 - (Aimed primarily at learners with SEN)
 - Important to note that existing curriculum already extensively vocationalised



- **Professional Qualifications**

- Generally refers to higher level university qualifications
- May also refer to specific certification controlled by professional bodies
- Associated with categories of occupation that have become defined as ‘professions’
 - Medical, legal, teachers, engineering, accounting
 - Wide array of other fields where the term is used and claimed including in relation to some trades
- No standardised system for how these qualifications prepare people for work e.g. workplace component very varied



So what is the problem?

- Terminology confusing and unclear what differences are in terms of purpose, level, pathway and institutional location
- Has implications for governance, funding and quality assurance
- Progression routes and pathways opaque
 - HEQSF qualification progression routes are ‘vocational’ ‘professional’ and ‘general’ (No occupational or technical)
 - SDA refers to qualification types associated with ‘trade’, ‘occupation’ and ‘profession’
 - 3S refers to training artisans and professionals and preparing people for occupations (are these occupational qualifications?)



- **Occupational**

- ‘Relating to a job or profession’

- **Vocational**

- ‘Relating to an occupation or employment’
 - ‘(education or training) directed at a particular occupation and its skills’

(Oxford Dictionary)



- **Occupational**

- *Occupare* or *occupatio* – taking possession or occupy
- Largely descriptive – no particular level or value attached (e.g. OFO)

BUT

- Also used differently in education and therapeutic disciplines both positively and negatively
- Activity to remediate, punish, usefully keep busy
 - ‘hard labour’ ‘occupational therapy’ ‘punishment’ ‘reform schools’
 - ‘gainfully employed’
 - (e.g. DBE 3S)



- **Vocational**

- *Vocare* – to call
- A calling i.e. to be spoken to (by a god, ancestors, a sense of moral purpose, an inner self)
- Associated with priesthood, but later also caring professions, lawyers
- Includes a value dimension
- Closer to concepts such as Beruf/beroep or umFundisa



- **Professional**

- *Professio* – public declaration (the response to the calling)
- Associated with priesthood
- Later associated with public declaration of expertise
- Now associated with certain occupations
 - Autonomy, judgement, not time bound, complex knowledge, self-regulated
 - Not consistent, many exceptions
 - Primarily about groups mobilising for status and power over time
 - Changes with changing nature of work, e.g secretaries, bank managers
- Being professional is more widely used to refer to behaviour, quality of work, ethics, expertise



- Vocational system always complex – heterogenous (CEDEFOP 2017)
 - Levels
 - Institutions
 - Orientation (learner or employer)
 - Vocationalisation of schooling and higher education

“Education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly in the labour market”

Similar definitions used by UNESCO, World Bank and national and international agencies. Include both vocational and occupational, and include all work-oriented education.

Therefore it is all ***Vocational***.



- ‘Vocational qualifications’ is the most common terminology used internationally and often is understood as middle level
- ‘Professional qualification’ is also common when referring to ‘professions’
- Occupational Qualifications’ is less often used.
 - Primarily in legal terms and human resources when referring to the qualification that may be used as a prerequisite for recruitment



- CEDEFOP Report points to important distinctions:
 1. National Policy definition of VET
 - In official policy documents
 2. National Policy conception of VET
 - How policy makers actually understand or view the system
 3. Public understanding of VET
 - Ordinary citizens' view of the system
 4. Actual VET system
 - What actually exists in terms of institutions and practices



UNEVOC discussion forum

‘Do other countries make a distinction?’

Not in terms of terminology, but there are tensions, debates and differences in most countries. Many are similar:

- Historical distinctions between vocational and technical
- Debates about where the training and education should happen
- Debates about how holistic or discreet the units of learning should be
- Debates about how wide the definition of work should be
- Debates about how deep the knowledge base should be



1. The development (and later decline) of the apprenticeship system
 - Particular history tied to mining and industrialisation, and the basis on which the VET system was built (therefore different to European craft tradition)
 - A form of dual system emerged for the engineering related trades
 - Expanded to include other fields over time – secretarial, hospitality, beauty
 - Evolved into the Technikon system (now UoT)
 - Specialised colleges emerged to cater for public service
 - Employers did their own training
2. The formal schooling system
 - Technical high schools
 - SEN schools
3. A well developed university system with professional qualifications



Post 1994 two key forces:

- SAQA Act of 1995 and the creation of the NQF
 - An ambitious attempt to integrate all education and training
- Division of responsibility for different parts of the system
 - Department of Labour and Department of Education
 - DoE Branches linked to NQF Bands
 - Quality Assurance bodies linked to Bands
- Structures create boundaries and institutions.



- The South African distinction between vocational and occupational qualifications has its roots in the
 - Organisational mandate and focus
 - Educational philosophy
 - Personalitiesof the different structures that emerged in the post-1994 dispensation
- DoE – inherited the actual training organisations, with those organisational pressures. Focus on staff, students, predictable processes. Responding to public focus on schooling crisis (massification). Influenced by particular ideas about vocational qualifications from UK, Australia.
- DoL and SETAs – focused on workers, skills and economy. Influenced by CBT training traditions, apprenticeship models from Europe,



- Implications spread through the system
 - Who and who didn't want responsibility for QA
 - Who should fund
 - What was offered at colleges
 - Who was involved in curriculum reform
- Despite attempts to resolve these issues (creation of DHET, NQF reviews, creation of QCTO) these issues still remain in the system
- DBE three stream model adds a new complexity which could leave new long term legacies if not resolved



Is there a difference between occupational and vocational qualifications?

Yes and No – subtle definitional differences in meaning, but these are not evident in how the terms are used when applied to qualifications

Yes, in SA they have taken on a different meaning in terms of institutional location, educational philosophy and history. However, this does not mean that there is a real difference that matters and is worth keeping.

So does it make a difference?



- There are important differences that need to be discussed. The discussion about the names masks important debates about how we conceptualise vocational education in a broad sense.
- Need to set aside definitions in policy, control, bureaucracy, power and personalities.
- Need to also recognise that systems evolve over the long term. We live with decisions for very long periods after the policy makers have moved on

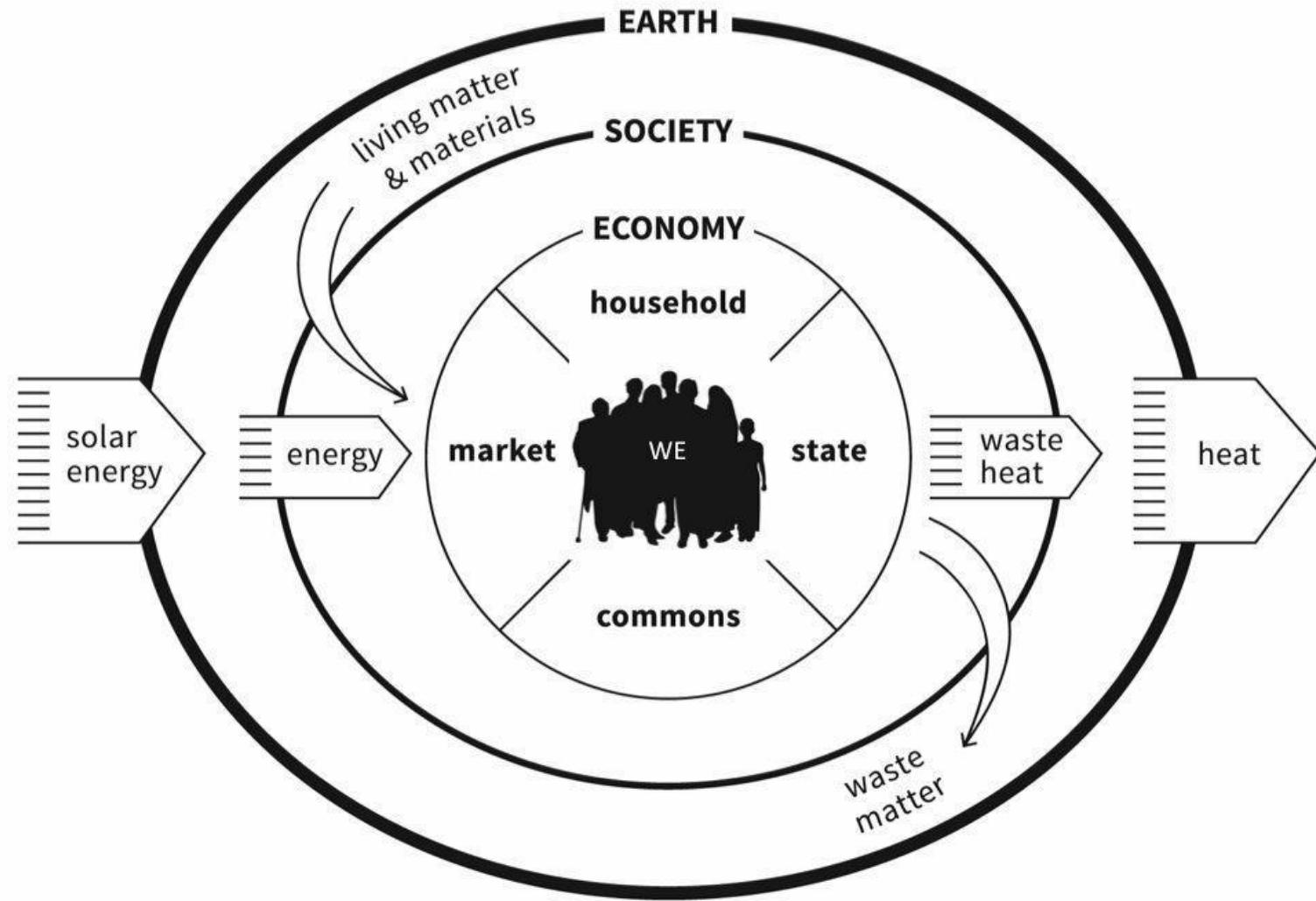
- What are these qualifications for?
 - Entry into work?
 - General orientation to work?
 - Entry into further qualification that may lead to work?
- Who are they for?



What is the nature of work in the 21st century

- The changes in production in the 4th Industrial Revolution may be signalling the end of work altogether
 - Picture not clear
 - Hollowing out
 - Increasing automation, AI etc leaves only services and care (for now)
- We can't just add entrepreneurship as an add on and think this will resolve the problem of work disappearing
- Traditional economic models are being challenged and rethought







- Fixing VET without rethinking the relationship between education and economic growth, and growth and human survival, is futile
- Given this expanded understanding, and given the rapid changes and very different types of work, no single qualification type is likely to work for all sectors.
 - Implications for programme design, duration, level, site of delivery
 - Implications for the breadth of occupations a single qualification prepares you for



- Institutionalisation
- Institutions can be understood as organisations AND sets of commonly understood practices, procedures and processes in society
- The latter is key when understanding the relationship between education qualifications and the labour market
- Therefore, building on existing institutions is key



- Heterogeneity, complexity and focus
- Can we have a complex heterogenous system, that is clear to the user?
- Differentiation and focus is key
 - Students need to know what is offered, by whom, and where that leads
- Reviewing existing VET offerings need to assess the extent these offerings are clear about the pathways into work (and on to further learning)
- Massification of VET is in tension with this.



Implications (not elaborated in the paper)

- Work against silos (can the NQF be the facilitator of this?)
- VET should be primarily about pathways into work, with learning pathways enabled
- High quality VET programmes should have a strong link to the place of work, but doesn't have to be workplace based
- VET should not be used as a form of remedial education, or as a mass 'warehousing'
- Strengthen the general education system as a foundation for VET, rather than using VET to fix the weaknesses in general education
- Recognise that the boundary between professional and other occupational categories is artificial and allow for system learning across these types
- Actively promote alignment between public understanding, policy conception and policy

Thank you!