

# THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND QUALITY ASSURANCE



Quality does not happen by accident. It requires commitment and constant attention from all those who are involved in the process.

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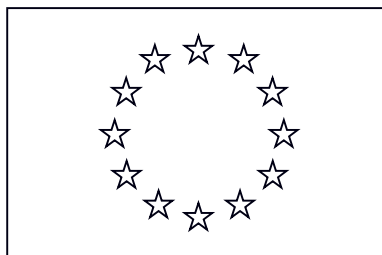
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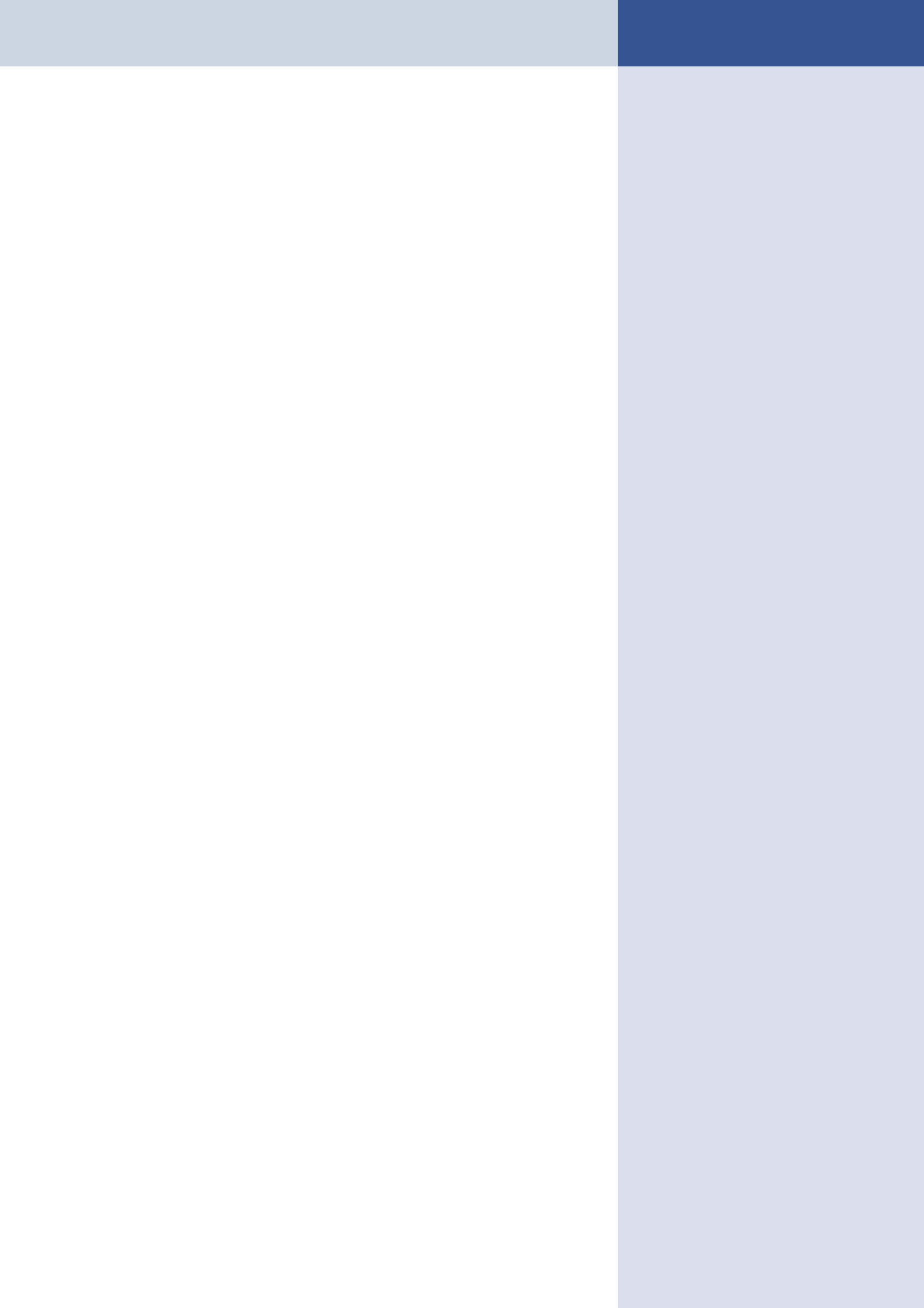
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**SAQA's Mission**

To ensure the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework which contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large.

## THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The NQF is a social construct whose meaning has been and will continue to be negotiated by the people, for the people. It is a lifelong learning system that brings together South Africans from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds representing a variety of worldviews, thinking, practice and experience to negotiate and define quality through the synthesis of these.

### What are the basic commitments in the NQF quality system?

Words and phrases like: *standards, quality, excellence, best practice, competent, qualified, knowledgeable, expert*, are often used to describe the necessary and desirable outcomes of education and training practices. In developing and implementing the National Qualifications Framework, these words have taken on particular meanings that guide South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) practices and processes. The practice in outlining and developing the integrated approach to outcomes-based education and training in South Africa has been to reserve **standards** for the units and qualifications registered on the NQF and **quality assurance** for learning and assessment provision.

The two key elements, ‘standards’ and ‘quality’ and the NQF standards setting and quality assurance processes, are built on the following basic tenets:

- Knowledge, relevant for the current world, is created through partnerships amongst various groupings in society, from academics and researchers to business, from workers to professional experts, from government to community organisations, from learners to professors. In other words, knowledge creation is no longer the preserve of narrowly-defined groups of ‘experts’; and
- The national system of education and training must balance the need for quality education for all citizens with the need for flexibility to cater for the wide-ranging circumstances that face learners and the wide-ranging options for delivering what constitutes relevant credits and qualifications. In other words, it must balance society’s needs with the needs of the individual.

### What is SAQA’s understanding of ‘quality’?

The commitment to developing representative and participatory processes and structures in which a variety of views, thinking, practice and experience are brought to bear on the development and implementation of

The national system of education and training must balance society’s needs with the needs of the individual.

Education and training have been contested terrain throughout most of South Africa's history. The roots of the NQF lie in these contestations and in the necessity for all South Africans to be able to equip themselves with the tools needed to negotiate life positively and productively.

the NQF points to an understanding of quality. Implicit is the notion that the definition and understanding of quality is arrived at through broad participation, negotiation and synthesis.

The objectives of the NQF offer a basis for a second common understanding of quality. The NQF seeks to establish a coherent, integrative education and training system that provides a platform for a unifying approach. It is a register for nationally agreed and internationally acceptable credible standards, expressed as learning outcomes, that are relevant to personal development and national socio-economic development. It is also flexible allowing for access, mobility, and progression in the system through the articulation and portability of credits and qualifications, the recognition of learning acquired in different ways, the provision of guidance and the establishment of acceleration mechanisms for the redress of past unfair discrimination. Quality indicators for the NQF will encompass these objectives.

The objectives would point to quality in the following way:

**Integration:** Qualifications and Standards would be expected to integrate theory and practice, and, skills, knowledge, values and attitudes. Policies, systems and practices of learning provision (learning, teaching and assessment including learning programmes, materials, activities etc) leading towards the acquisition of qualifications and standards the same integration would be expected.

**Learning outcomes:** Qualifications and standards would be expected to clearly state the expected skills, knowledge, values and attitudes to be acquired and level and standard expected of these in order to guide learners and facilitators of learning. The learning provision would also be expected to be designed such that these are achieved.

**Access, mobility and progression:** Qualifications and standards would be expected to be designed in a way that ensures that they do not lead learners to a dead end, that they allow for continued learning and for improved employment opportunities. Learning provision would be expected to ensure that learning is a process of building knowledge and skills.

**Redress:** Qualifications and standards would be expected to ensure that the potential of citizens that were previously denied education and training opportunities is brought to the fore and recognised so that they can be improved for the individual's development and the country's social-political-economic development.

**Personal and National Development:** Qualifications and standards would be expected to ensure that learners are developed so that they can be responsible for their own social-political-economic development and for the reconstruction and development of the country. Learning provision would be expected to ensure the realisation of the same.

In summary, the above elements would be some of the criteria for making judgement about whether what is being provided is educationally sound.

For a further understanding of quality it is also important to understand why the principles embedded in the objectives underpin the NQF.

Education and, to a less visible extent, training have been contested terrain throughout most of South Africa's history. The roots of the NQF lie in these contestations and in the necessity for all South Africans to be able to equip themselves with the tools needed to negotiate life positively and productively.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the largest stakeholders in education and training have been engaged in a process of looking at what South Africa needs for individual and general human resources development, now and in the future, within the national requirements for equity, development and growth.

The following table outlines the principles that underpin the objectives of the NQF with a brief reminder of what the majority of South African learners have experienced to date. Brief explanations of each principle are also included and these explanations point to expectations regarding what is educationally sound in the South African context.

Principle	Definition	Majority experience
Integration...	... form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training	... separation by race, sex, age; by mental and manual, theory and practice, academic and technical and vocational
Relevance...	... be and remain responsive to national development needs	... little match between what is taught in schools and what is required for the world of work
Credibility...	... have national and international value and acceptance	... only some certificates and qualifications are accepted and recognised at international and even national levels
Coherence...	... work within a consistent framework of principles and certification	... little or no means to establish equivalency across programmes and providers
Flexibility...	... allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends	... no mechanisms for assessing and recognising non-formal provision or prior learning through life and work experience
Standards...	... be expressed in terms of a nationally agreed framework and internationally acceptable outcomes	... varied differences in standards across different institutions, sectors, enterprises, provinces, and the fragmented national government departments
Legitimacy...	... provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications	... little or no co-operation or consultation across government departments (education, training and manpower) with little co-operation across industries, enterprises or sectors and little involvement with the state who relied heavily on experts'
Access...	... provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression	... entry principally by certificate based on years of study and generally restricted by race, sex and age
Articulation...	... provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system	... entry requirements set at provider level with large differences between providers. Change of learning interest generally meant starting again.

Principle	Definition	Majority experience
Progression...	... ensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system	... rather than stepping through a clearly sequenced series of outcome requirements for higher levels on a learning pathway, learners were required to attain credits and qualifications in ways specified at the particular provider
Portability...	... enable learners to transfer their credits or qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another	... training generally sector, enterprise or even employer specific, locking learners in because there was no common recognition system
Recognition of Prior Learning... (RPL)	... through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways e.g. through life experience	... front-end education delivery system whereby learning is regarded to stop at a particular point in life thereby excluding the possibility of learning in contexts other than the formal system
Guidance of Learners...	... provide for the counselling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers	... guidance and counselling viewed as specialist services and separate from the learning system itself. Services were only available to a minority of learners and at particular points in career development.

In sum, it is these objectives, and the principles embedded in them, that constitute the **quality indicators** for the national outcomes and requirements of the NQF. Every standard and qualification registered on the NQF will, in the final analysis, have been evaluated against these objectives and principles to ensure that they meet the criteria for an integrated lifelong learning system. In the same way, the basis on which learning and learning assessments are provided will also be evaluated according to these objectives and principles. In short, it is the implementation of these that provides for national and international confidence in the standards and qualifications, registered, provided and achieved.

A third understanding of quality is implicit in the implementation processes of the NQF. On the one hand, it provides for the establishment and registration of education and training standards through participatory and representative processes and structures. This is complemented by the quality assurance and management of the learning provision for the achievement of the standards through the establishment of representative structures responsible for quality assurance and management processes including the rigorous quality assurance and management of assessment. Critical elements of the quality management of assessment are the registration of assessors and the establishment of moderation systems. The registration of assessors is a means of ensuring that those who assess are appropriately experienced and have the appropriate capability to provide credible assessment and to assess learners in a fair, reliable and valid manner. The establishment of moderation systems also ensures the same. A credible assessment system that lays the foundation for the fair, reliable and valid assessment of learners and their achievement is crucial for the

NQF because the NQF places learners and their achievements at the centre of the system.

Furthermore, the integrity of the NQF is established by the separate and, yet, inter-linked processes of standard setting and quality auditing of learning provision. The separation breaks down elitist power enclaves that could result in narrow, inward looking definitions of quality and, therefore, the delivery of learning provision whose beneficial impact on personal development and national socio-economic development - the ultimate objective of education, training and human resource development – is inadequate, inappropriate and irrelevant. On the other hand, the processes have to be linked. The look-back from processes for quality assurance for standards setting represents the cycle for ongoing development and implementation of the system. In fact, the NQF is a quality cycle that implies that quality is dynamic and not static, that quality means the continual growth and development of standards for learners' needs and uses.

## The NQF quality spiral

From this it is clear that the NQF, to be a **quality** education and training system, must provide a beneficial impact on the lives of all South Africans. In order to provide this impact, standards set in participatory and representative processes need to be delivered and assessed in ways which assure all users of this framework for lifelong learning, that such standards are being achieved, maintained and continually improved.

The quality spiral is clearly visible when structures and processes required for developing the NQF registered standards and qualifications, with their specific assessment and accreditation requirements, are overlaid with the structures and processes required for ensuring the provision and achievement of such standards and qualifications.

The outline of NQF structures and systems below captures the dynamic relations between the separate functions of standards setting and quality assurance. In essence, the quality process is seen to begin with standards setting and the registration of standards and qualifications on the NQF. Once registered, Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) can then be accredited to monitor and audit the provision, assessment and achievement of specified standards and/or qualifications.

Evaluation and reporting requirements for accredited bodies (ETQAs and providers) provide a direct and dynamic feedback mechanism to standards setting, ensuring the continual improvement of the standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.

Implicit in SAQA's outline of the quality spiral is the understanding that *quality is not a thing; quality is an ongoing event*. The NQF quality spiral and the quality assurance system have to encapsulate this dynamic notion of quality as a continuous event in order to ensure the continual development and redevelopment of standards and qualifications to meet individual learner needs and society's needs.

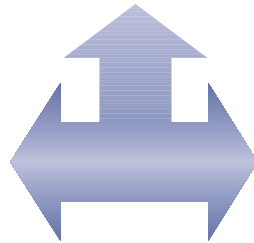
Implicit in SAQA's outline of the quality spiral is the understanding that *quality is not a thing; quality is an ongoing event*.

**SAQA**

- Statutory body appointed by the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour
- National education and training stakeholder membership
- Reports to Parliament
- Responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the NQF

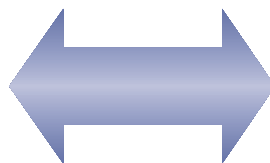
**Standards Setting**

- Structured into twelve organising fields of learning
- National stakeholder standards setting bodies with equitable representation through six stakeholder categories
- Accountable to constituencies and through the Authority to the two ministers and Parliament for development of standards (units and qualifications)
- Responsible for recommending standards (units and qualifications) to the Authority for registration on the National Qualifications Framework.
- Responsible for ensuring that all standards consist of clear statements of learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria together with requisite moderation and accreditation criteria.
- Responsible for ensuring the quality (relevance, credibility and legitimacy) of the standards recommended to the Authority
- Responsible for recognising and, when necessary, establishing standards generating bodies
- Responsible for ensuring the review of registered standards and the development of standards setting processes where and when necessary.



**N  
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*Comprised of registered standards, units and qualifications at eight levels of learning*



**Quality Assurance**

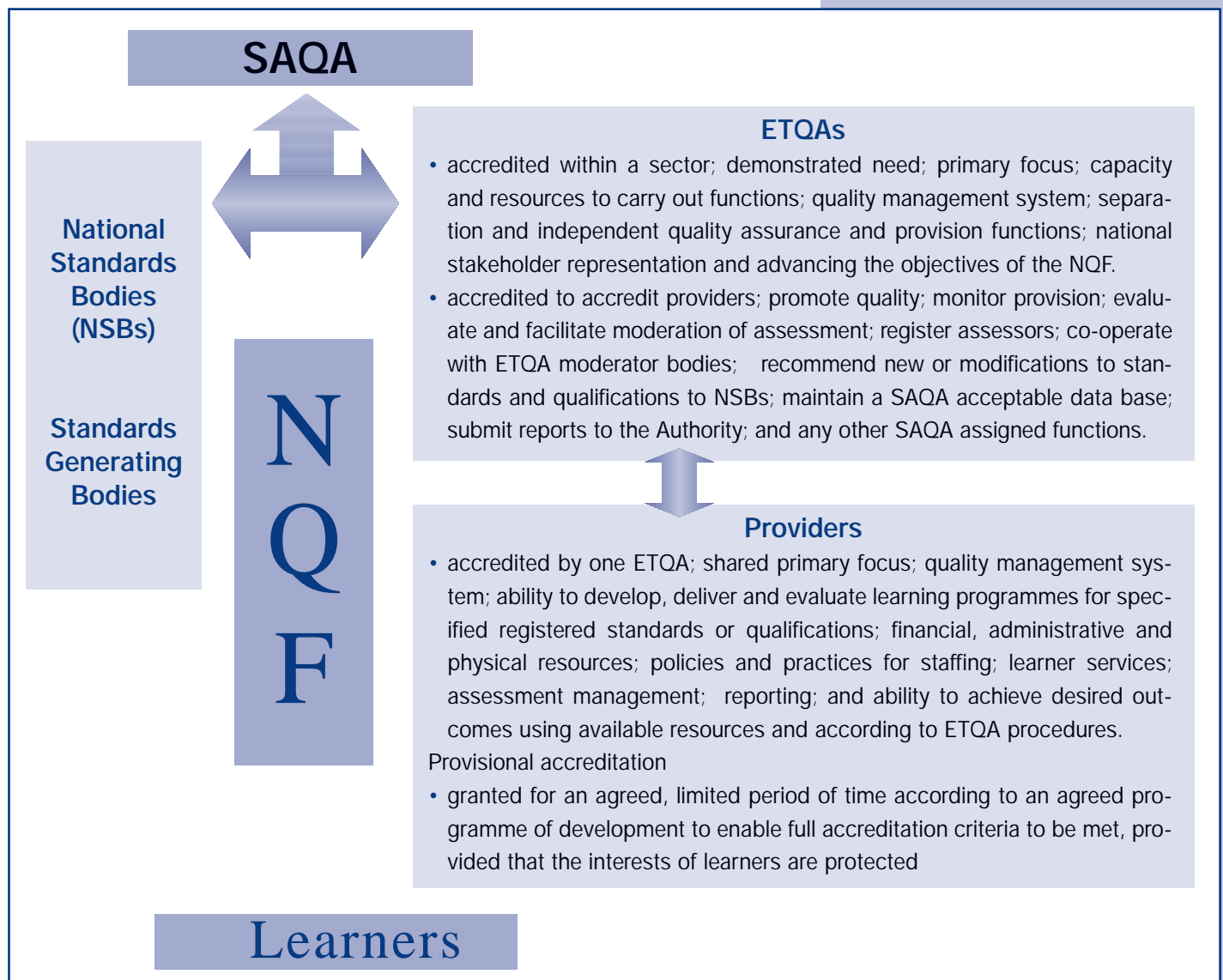
- Structured into three sectors: economic, social, education and training sub-system.
  - Organised for two principal bodies: accrediting bodies (ETQAs) and accredited learning providers.
  - Decision-making structures to include national stakeholder representatives to ensure public accountability, relevance and credibility.
- ETQAs:
- Accountable to SAQA for the standards of learning achievements and provision in their area of primary focus.
  - Responsible for assuring the quality of learning achievements within a specified context for registered standards (units and qualifications) chiefly through
    - (a) registration of assessors;
    - (b) accreditation of providers, and
    - (c) quality management system.
- Providers
- Accountable to ETQA – through primary focus – for management, development and delivery of learning programmes and services for which they are accredited
  - Responsible for ensuring the quality of the learning experience according to the requirements of the registered standards and qualifications
  - Responsible for recording, researching and reporting the outcomes and impact of their learning programmes and services.
- Moderating bodies
- Appointed by SAQA according to NSB recommendations
  - Responsible for ensuring that assessment of registered outcomes is fair, valid and reliable across the NQF

**Learners**

## What is quality assurance for the NQF and how will it work?

The previous outline of the quality system for the NQF makes visible the holistic quality management system that is required for SAQA to realize its objective to **enhance the quality of education and training**. The outline below focuses on the structures and processes that are required for the **quality assurance system** associated with the NQF. It is this outline that speaks directly to the continuum of quality assurance and quality management activities required for the accreditation, monitoring and auditing of ETQAs and providers. Furthermore, it is this quality assurance system that talks directly to the assessment of learners and learning achievements.

The quality system captured below demonstrates the inclusion in the SAQA implementation framework of outcomes and processes in a system of linkages and feedback loops. This figurative representation reflects the structures and processes, relationships and communication flows, from learner through the Authority, that are necessary for the accreditation, monitoring, and evaluation of ETQAs, providers, assessment systems and, ultimately, learners themselves.



SAQA's concern is in ensuring that learners awarded NQF standards and qualifications are able to demonstrate the related learning outcomes in accordance with the criteria and requirements specified in those standards and qualifications.

Traditionally, approaches to quality assurance and quality management are associated with industry and manufacturing in respect of products and services. Within education, the setting and maintenance of standards has been concerned with achievements of learners at exit or qualification points. Implicit in SAQA's implementation of a total quality system for the NQF is the understanding that quality assurance, quality management and accreditation are not things or products; rather quality is a process.

In quality terms, the quality spiral captured above can be said to include all the critical points in the quality process:

**The product or outcome:** awards; achievement of standards or qualifications; accreditation.

**The inputs:** learning provision; programmes; learning and learner resources; life or experiential learning.

**The process:** the quality of the learning and assessment interactions; the quality of the monitoring and auditing interactions.

The quality of the product or outcome is the primary responsibility of National Standard Bodies (NSBs) and their Standard Generating Bodies (SGBs). The quality of inputs and process is the primary responsibility of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) and providers of learning. The quality of products or outcomes will have a bearing on the quality of the inputs and processes as they lay a basis for the nature of inputs and processes required to achieve the products or outcomes. Likewise, the quality of the inputs and processes will have a bearing on the quality of the products or outcomes in that it is the quality management and assurance of the inputs and processes that the appropriateness of the design and the personal and national social-political and economic relevance of an outcome can be determined.

The depiction above allows for the key activities associated with quality management processes to be included in the SAQA quality spiral. In particular, a continuum of quality assurance and quality management activities emerges which includes input and outcome assessments and evaluations, quality checks and controls, as well quality assurance and management of process and processes.

The quality assurance system adopted is one in which Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies are accredited to safeguard and improve the delivery and achievement of NQF-registered standards and qualifications. It is through these structures that the needs of society and the learner can be brought together in balanced and accommodative ways.

Accrediting ETQAs also demonstrates SAQA's recognition that delivery of NQF-registered standards and qualifications is the preserve of providers and learners and other key stakeholders in the field of learning provision and assessment. SAQA's concern is not in ensuring that all providers and assessors follow a national programme. Rather, it is in ensuring that learners awarded NQF standards and qualifications are able to demonstrate the related learning outcomes in accordance with the criteria and requirements specified in those standards and qualifications.

SAQA will only register national standards and qualifications on the NQF. Learning programmes will not be registered. Rather, providers will be required to present their learning programmes to the ETQA for evaluation.

This accreditation process is directed at assuring learners and other users of the system that any learner who has achieved a credit, credits or a qualification through that provider programme or assessment, has demonstrated the required learning outcomes in the required manner.

SAQA recognises that the best group for ensuring that this will be the case is a body made up of representatives of stakeholders active and specialist in a particular area of NQF standards and qualifications. In other words, the area of **primary focus** of NQF-registered standards and qualifications for the ETQA.

## Linking Standards Setting and Quality Assurance together in the quality system

The central mechanism which allows the separate SAQA Standards Setting and Quality Assurance processes to act together to ensure quality in the education and training system, is the form in which the standards and qualifications are registered on the NQF.

The form in which standards and qualifications are described and registered has to enable all the learning delivery, assessment and certification structures and processes to implement the outcomes and requirements developed through standards generating and NSBs.

The SAQA Act of 1995 defines a **standard** as

*registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria*

and a **qualification** as

*the formal recognition of the achievement of the required number and range of credits and such other requirements at specific levels of the National Qualifications Framework as may be determined by the relevant bodies registered for such purpose by the South African Qualifications Authority.*

Building on these definitions, the National Standards Bodies (NSB) Regulations (RSA, 1998) specify, amongst others, the following requirements for the registration of standards and unit standards:

- 7(1) (k) *the specific outcomes to be assessed;*
- (l) *the assessment criteria, including essential embedded knowledge;*
  - (m) *the accreditation process (including moderation) for the unit standard;*
  - (n) *the range statements as a general guide for the scope, context and level being used for this unit standard; and*
  - (o) *a 'notes' category which must include the critical outcomes contemplated in Regulation 7(4) supported by the unit standard, should include references to essential embedded knowledge, if not addressed under assessment criteria and may include other supplementary information on the unit standard.*

This accreditation process is directed at assuring learners and other users of the system that any learner who has achieved a credit, credits or a qualification through that provider programme or assessment, has demonstrated the required learning outcomes in the required manner.

The SAQA Act and the two sets of SAQA Regulations specify the accountability and reporting chains for accredited bodies and NSBs.

Requirements for the registration of qualifications specify that the qualification should:

*8(1) (a) represent a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes;  
have both specific and critical cross-field outcomes which promote lifelong learning;  
incorporate integrated assessment appropriately to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved, and such assessments shall use a range of formative and summative assessment methods...*

From these requirements it is clear that the essential vehicle for communication between setting and attaining learning standards or qualifications will be the format in which these will be registered on the NQF. This is underpinned by the necessity for linking assessment and accreditation policies and practices across these two arms of the NQF: standards setting and quality assurance.

Given this, the structures and procedures for the NQF quality assurance system have to be built around the necessities for implementing, maintaining and monitoring the quality of provision (provider and learning programme) and for the quality of assessment of achievements and awards (standards and qualifications).

## How will quality assurance feed back into standards setting processes?

The SAQA Act and the two sets of SAQA Regulations specify the accountability and reporting chains for accredited bodies and NSBs. These are reflected in the earlier diagrams. Principally, the central reporting requirements are directly concerned with the NQF registered standards and qualifications. For example, NSBs are required to report to SAQA on the status of the standards and qualifications in their respective organising fields of learning. ETQAs are required to report on learner enrolments and achievements for such registered standards and qualifications.

As the diagrammatic representations indicate, the channel for communication between standards setting and quality assurance processes is through the Authority. In practice, this will mean that ETQAs will probably make their submissions to NSBs via SAQA. This will ensure that SAQA is able to co-ordinate and integrate the information across the bodies. This is especially critical in view of the fact that the fields of learning around which NSBs and SGBs are constructed are different from the sectors within which ETQAs are accredited.

Through the reporting mechanisms, NSBs will be dynamically updated on the impact and ongoing relevance of the registered standards and qualifications for which they are responsible.

In order to fulfil the reporting requirements related to the specific standards and qualifications for whose quality assurance they are responsible, ETQAs will submit, at least, the following information to SAQA on an annual basis:

- learner take-up of standards and qualifications, i.e. learner enrolments by standard or qualification;
- learner progress and achievements;
- appropriateness of learning outcomes to assessment criteria and integrative assessments in the case of qualifications not based on unit standards;
- access to additional or further education and training opportunities or employment opportunities for learners achieving the standards or qualifications;
- self-reviews and evaluations of quality management systems, policies and procedures in place amongst constituent providers; and
- proposals for new or amendments to registered standards or qualifications.

## Maintaining the integrity of the quality system: the separation of standards setting bodies from quality assurance bodies

The SAQA Act and the ETQA Regulations clearly separate the structures and functions of standards setting and quality assurance. Chapter 6 of the ETQA Regulations makes clear the separation of accrediting, moderating and standards setting activities in relation to Examining and Professional bodies.

Members of ETQAs and other accredited bodies would be able to facilitate the development of and actively participate in standards generating bodies on behalf of accredited structures or as individuals. However, the accredited body or organisation could not hold equal accreditation and standards generating status in the SAQA-NQF system. In practice, this means that ETQA bodies could participate in, initiate and even take the lead in establishing Standards Generating Bodies – but they could not be the Standards Generating Body without other significant and critical stakeholders.

Finally, and in order to underline this separation, ETQAs cannot hold accredited or constituent provider status while they are accredited as quality assurance bodies.

## A model for implementing ETQA accreditation

SAQA's guiding principles for the functioning of ETQAs are:

- Responsibility for the development and formulation of quality assurance policies on a system wide level rests with SAQA.
- The reality is that there will be more than one ETQA operating within each of the bands of the NQF, a number of which have statutory obliga-

However, the accredited body or organisation could not hold equal accreditation and standards generating status in the SAQA-NQF system. ETQAs cannot hold accredited or constituent provider status while they are accredited as quality assurance bodies.

**ETQAs will work together in partnership arrangements where responsibilities and the various modus operandi are made explicit in contractual agreements between the bodies concerned.**

tions to ensure quality provision and/or have international recognition as bodies responsible for ensuring quality provision and/or assessment.

- ETQAs will work together in partnership arrangements where responsibilities and the various modus operandi are made explicit in contractual agreements between the bodies concerned. It may be necessary in some instances for SAQA to identify one ETQA as a co-ordinator and facilitator of discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established.
  - As ultimate responsibility rests with SAQA, SAQA will facilitate discussions, and mediate any conflicts with a view to resolving difficulties.
- The operational model for implementation in the first phase of ETQA accreditation is founded on the following pragmatic realities:

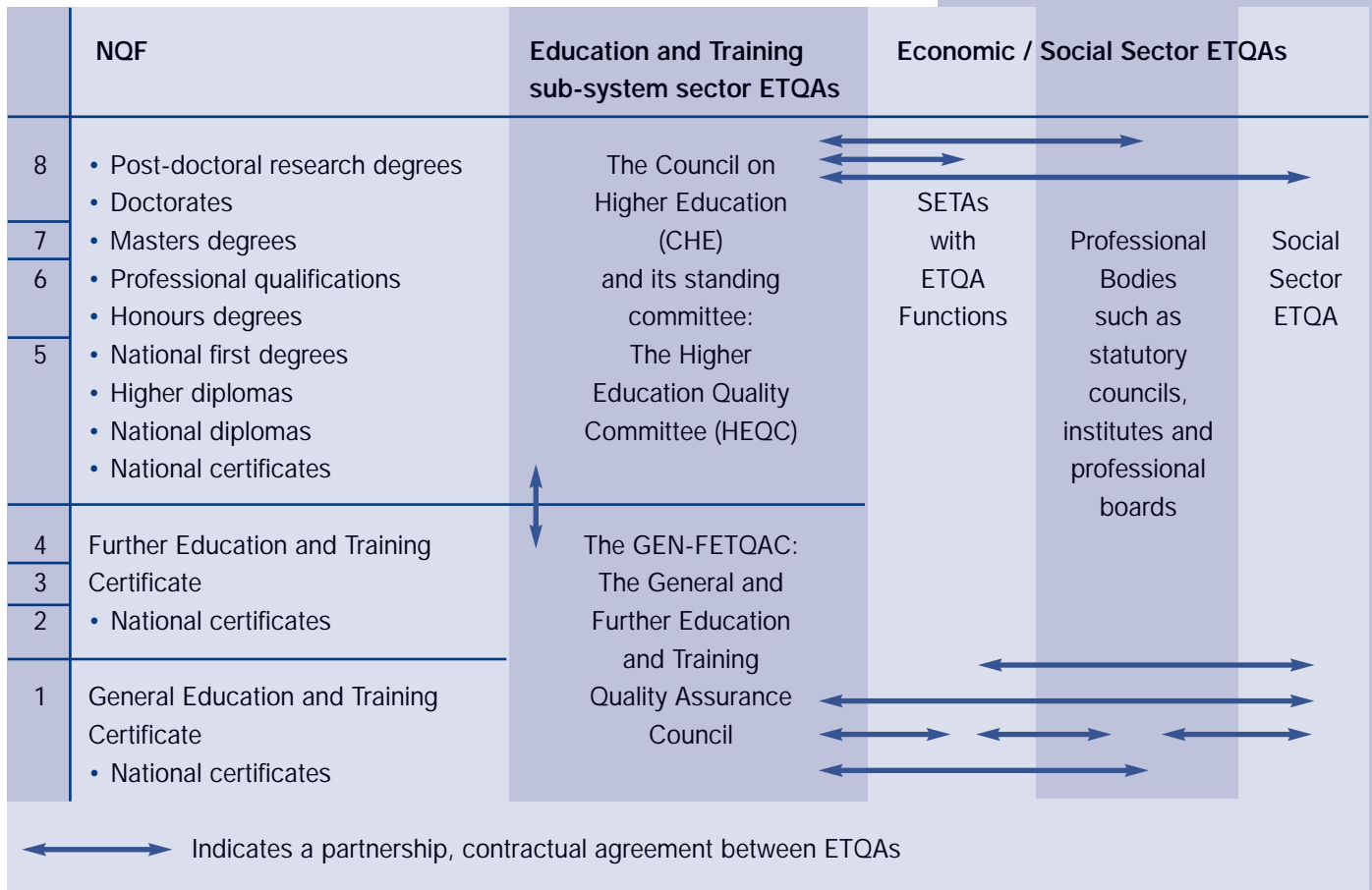
- SAQA accredits ETQAs.
- ETQAs can be accredited in one of three sectors for a particular set of NQF qualifications and standards.
- Those bodies which currently have legal or statutory accreditation, assessment and quality assurance functions, or function as such with national and/or international recognition but without specific legislation, will be the focus for accreditation evaluations.
- Accreditation evaluations will initially be undertaken against existing nationally recognised qualifications recorded on the SAQA database. As NQF standards and qualifications are registered, bodies will be able to apply for accreditation against these.
- This first phase of accreditation will build on what exists and on practices that will need to be in place until at least 2003 when qualifications registered as national qualifications on the interim database will have been through the standards setting process, as stated in the NSB Regulations.

Essentially the proposed model accepts that there will be some duplication in the award of standards and qualifications across ETQAs and that the central issue to be addressed is the relationships between and amongst different kinds of ETQAs. The following diagram illustrates the overlaps between ETQAs in two known sectors, using qualifications and standards for which each is assumed to be responsible. The diagram shows how the proposed model addresses the overlaps by ensuring coherence within a flexible framework, principally through the notion of contractual partnerships amongst equals.

In addition to the overlaps between each education and training sub-system and economic sector ETQA, there are also overlaps between the other forms of economic sector ETQA previously mentioned.

For example, some of the statutory health councils have indicated that they have, or require, powers over the accreditation of providers and the certification of learners at levels below the equivalent of level 5 on the NQF. Moreover, the Department of Labour has indicated that some SETAs would require ETQA functions assigned at least to level 5 on the NQF. If one considers service-related SETAs such as Education and Training, Media, Finance and the like, then it is clear that some SETAs would need to be accredited as ETQAs beyond level 5.

The approach to minimising duplication of functions and activities at operational level which underpins the proposed model, builds on the strengths of current quality assurance activities and processes, For example, those between learning institutions and professional councils. The model for



the implementation phase is built on international and local models which distinguish between institutional and programme evaluations and accreditation, adds the dimensions of formative qualifications – particularly in respect of the general and further education and training bands – and incorporates the differences in focus of single and multi-purpose providers. The latter two are, in fact, further dimensions of the notion of primary focus.

The model asserts that the integration of institutional and programme audits and evaluations is critical to the quality improvement spiral. However, this integration can be achieved in a number of ways without residing in a single body. In other words, this integration can be reached through a combination of structured relationships and practices appropriate to the particular qualification (or standard) and to the institution or provider.

As a general rule one would expect the ETQAs of primary focus responsible for accrediting providers to be responsible for institutional audits.

In the case of single purpose providers, the quality assurance functions are likely to be carried out by the appropriate ETQA in the relevant economic or social sector. Such an ETQA would perform its functions in consultation with any other ETQA which has a valid interest in the quality assurance of provision at the institution.

In the case of multi-purpose providers, the quality assurance functions are likely to be carried out by the relevant education and training sub-sector ETQA. Within the framework of the model they would carry out this function in a co-operative manner, involving other relevant ETQAs, which will have responsibility for the accreditation of a variety of programmes offered at these institutions. This co-operative process will be based on contractual

**In the case of multi-purpose providers, the quality assurance functions are likely to be carried out by the relevant education and training sub-sector ETQA in a co-operative manner, involving other relevant ETQAs, which will have responsibility for the accreditation of a variety of programmes offered at these institutions.**

agreements arrived at in discussions, co-ordinated and facilitated by an ETQA identified by SAQA as the co-ordinator and facilitator of discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established.

### Example

*What is a possible implementation model for quality assurance in the Higher Education and Training Band?*

In the HET band there are likely to be a number of ETQAs:

- the Council on Higher Education (CHE) through its standing committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC);
- various professional bodies such as statutory councils, professional boards and councils, professional institutes and the like; and
- the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

Institutions offering standards and qualifications within this band fall into two possible categories – single-purpose providers and multi-purpose providers.

In the case of single-purpose providers, the quality assurance functions are likely to be carried out by the appropriate ETQA in the relevant economic or social sector. Such an ETQA would perform its functions in consultation with any other ETQA which has a valid interest in the quality assurance of provision at the institution.

In the case of multi-purpose providers, the major problem facing the sector is cohesion and a co-ordinated approach to quality assurance. This is desirable so that providers are not subjected to numerous on-site visits and different quality assurance requirements from each ETQA that has an interest in its provision. Hence it is appropriate for the CHE, through the HEQC, as the ETQA of primary focus for higher education institutions such as public universities, technikons, colleges and private higher education institutions, in terms of the ETQA regulations, to perform the co-ordinating function in partnership with other ETQAs working in the band. The CHE then will:

- Facilitate a common interpretation of quality assurance policy for the HET band by ETQAs operating in the band;
- Co-ordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment;
- provide a platform together with SAQA for regular discussion on quality assurance policy and implementation issues by ETQAs in the HET band;
- co-ordinate and facilitate discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established; and
- set up in consultation with the other relevant ETQAs, co-ordinated time-frames for quality assurance visits to providers and facilitate other administrative quality assurance measures common to all ETQAs.

In performing its co-ordinating function in the HET band, the CHE through the HEQC would need to perform this function in consultation with SAQA and other relevant ETQAs.

In performing its co-ordinating function in the HET band, the CHE through the HEQC would need to perform this function, mindful of SAQA's responsibility for quality assurance at a system wide level and the position of other ETQAs recognised by SAQA as having responsibilities in the band.

## The NQF and Assessment

The ETQA Regulations require that ETQAs have in place policies and procedures for the management of assessment as part of their quality management systems. The principles of the NQF are viewed as critical in providing one set of parameters for these policies. These principles are seen to do so in the following way.

### Integrated Assessment

- In each unit standard assess specific and critical crossfield outcomes
- In qualifications (unit standard based and exit level outcomes + assessment criteria), assess learning outcomes which have a defined purpose/purposes, including specific and critical crossfield outcomes
- Assess applied competence which is a combination of practical competence, foundational competence and reflexive competence<sup>1</sup>
- Use formative and summative assessment
- Use a variety of assessment methods and instruments

### Recognition of Achievements

- Assess what the learner knows and can do
- Credit what the learner knows and can do

### Access, Progression, Portability, Articulation

To enable progression through the levels of the framework

- Credit achievements
- Allow the building up of credits
- Enable the transference of credits from one learning situation or site to another

### Recognition of prior learning

- Allow for accelerated access to further learning
- Assess and give credit to evidence of learning that has already been acquired in different ways

### Legitimacy and credibility

Be transparent in terms of the standard expected, that is:

- what the learner is expected to achieve

The ETQA Regulations require that ETQAs have in place policies and procedures for the management of assessment as part of their quality management systems.

<sup>1</sup> In SAQA terms this is **applied competence**: which is the union of practical competence, foundational competence and reflexive competence.

- **Practical competence** is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which to follow and to perform the chosen action,
- practical competence is grounded in **foundational competence** where the learner demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking which underpins the action taken,
- and it is integrated through **reflexive competence**, in which the learner demonstrates the ability to integrate or connect performances and decision making with understanding and with an ability to adapt to change in unforeseen circumstances appropriately and responsibly and explain the reason behind these adaptations.

These principles assure that the assessment process is fair, valid, reliable and practical and provides accurate information about the individual that has been assessed.

- what criteria will be used to assess achievement
- what the learner will have to do to show achievement
- how it will be assessed
- the conditions under which or the situation in which the assessment will take place
- the underpinning knowledge that will have a bearing
- the amount, complexity and type of evidence that will be required
- how moderation will be done
- when the assessment will take place

## Flexibility

Use a variety of assessment methods and instruments<sup>2</sup>, however, ensuring that the chosen method(s), instrument(s) are fair, reliable, valid, and practical.

## Guidance of learners

Through the use of a variety of approaches, methods and instruments, and through continuous formative assessment counsel learners – inform learners about:

- what they do know and can do
- what they need to know and do
- how they can achieve what they need to know and do
- when they are ready to be assessed for qualification purposes.

As assessment is central to recognition of achievement, therefore, the quality of that assessment is important in order to provide credible certification. Credibility in assessment is assured through assessment procedures and practices being governed by certain principles. These principles are:

- Fairness
- Validity
- Reliability
- Practicability

These principles help to allay the concerns and anxieties that the users of assessment results (learners, parents, employers, learning institutions and the general public) have about assessment, as assessment results often affect personal, social and economic progression and mobility in society. They assure users of the credibility of the assessment process. They assure that

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2 Assessment method refers to the activity that an assessor engages in, as he or she assesses a learner and the learner's work. Normally the activities are:

- observation – means observing the learner while they are carrying out the activities, whether real or simulated, defined in an outcome or outcomes statement
- evaluation of product – means looking at something the learner has made or done after the activity has been completed
- questioning – means asking the candidate questions either orally or in writing and which can be answered orally or in writing. The questions could relate to the activities described in the outcome to check if the learner understands why the activities were carried out or they could test the learner's ability to work within contexts given in the range statements or in the contingencies suggested by the assessment criteria. Questioning is also an important means of establishing evidence of a learner's underpinning knowledge and understanding
- Assessment instrument refers to the nature of the assessment task or activity given to the learner to do, for example assignments, tests/examinations, projects, cases studies, oral questions, practical exercises.

the assessment process is fair, valid, reliable and practical and provides accurate information about the individual that has been assessed.

A final critical framing element is that of the standard. The standard in NQF standards is held in a statement of outcomes and accompanying assessment criteria. It is against the standard that assessment is planned, designed and administered.

The ETQA Regulations specify the registration of assessors as a key function of ETQAs. The register of assessors is a means of ensuring that there is a pool of assessors that are deemed to have the appropriate experience and expertise to assess according to principles and to the assessment requirements of registered standards.

For SAQA, assessor includes all practitioners responsible for the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes. SAQA is of the view that assessor can refer to a practitioner – assessor and to the assessor being different from the practitioner.

The notion of the education and training practitioner being both the learning facilitator and assessor means that teachers, lecturers and trainers who traditionally have administered assessment in addition to facilitating learning can be legally recognised as assessors. It also allows for the inclusion of other persons in the assessment process such as workplace supervisors, managers or team leaders. The management of their assessment can be included in the overall management and maintenance of an assessment system.

In some instances the assessor may be a different person from the learning facilitator. This is also acceptable to SAQA. The assessor in this instance would, also, need to be registered as an assessor.

Finally, the NQF allows for the devolution of a substantial amount of the management and administration of assessment to providers. As such, moderation systems become essential. Included in the quality management of assessment is the establishment of internal and external moderation systems to ensure the credibility of the system.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the National Qualifications Framework through its implementing agency, the South African Qualifications Authority, represents a unique opportunity for implementing a total quality approach to education and training in South Africa that is in keeping with the objectives and principles of an integrated lifelong learning system which enjoys national and international recognition and credibility.

The register of assessors is a means of ensuring that there is a pool of assessors that are deemed to have the appropriate experience and expertise to assess according to principles and to the assessment requirements of registered standards.





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