GUIDELINES THAT
ENABLE, PROMOTE AND BETTER
ARTICULATION INITIATIVES

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1. BACKGROUND

Democratic South Africa inherited an unfair society. The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was the means chosen to integrate the education and training system. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is mandated to oversee the implementation and further development of the NQF, and conducts research to support this work – expanding its capacity through long-term research partnerships with public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Much has been achieved regarding systemic redress, access, progression, quality and transparency in the context of the NQF. Articulation, or learner transitioning, are major foci in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (Minister of Higher Education and Training [MHET], 2013). There are known transitioning barriers. SAQA set up the SAQA-Durban University of Technology (DUT) Research Partnership for *Developing an understanding of the enablers of student transitioning between Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) Colleges and HEIs and beyond[1]*, to investigate successful transitioning models.

NATIONAL POLICY FOR ARTICULATION

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) gazetted Articulation Policy for the PSET system in South Africa (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2017). The policy creates an enabling environment to ensure amongst others, that:

- articulation occurs within and between the three NQF Sub-Frameworks;
- institutions work together to develop learning and work pathways; and
- support is provided for learners as they follow their individual learning and work pathways.

CURRENT UNDERSTANDINGS OF ARTICULATION

Articulation is currently understood in at least three ways.

- First, articulation can be understood broadly, as '**systemic articulation'** or 'joined up' qualifications and various other elements aligned to and supporting, learning pathways. Systemic articulation is based on legislation and the steering mechanisms available to the state, such as planning and funding in the education and training system.

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[1] The words 'learner' and 'student' are used inter-changeably throughout this report. 'Learner' denotes anyone of any age engaged in learning; it is used in many NQF and progressive policies and texts in South Africa and internationally, and by many respondents in the National Articulation Baseline Study. 'Student' is often used to describe learners in TVET Colleges and HEI, and is also used by many respondents in the Study. An attempt has been made to use 'learner' as far as possible, but where respondents have used 'student', this has not been changed.

- '**Specific articulation**' is based on the formal and informal agreements within the system for education and training – between institutions – as guided by policies, accreditation principles, and mechanisms like Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) or Memoranda of Understanding (MoU).

- Third, articulation exists through the **addressing of boundary-making practices and the support of boundary-crossing practices** as individuals encounter 'boundary zones' between the different elements of learning pathways, and adopt 'boundary-crossing practices' in their transitioning along their pathways[2]. This support includes reducing the gap between learning pathway-related policy development and implementation; strengthening specific pathways and enhancing the opportunities to access and progress along these pathways; the quality of education and training; Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision (FLTP)[3]; appropriate and timely career development advice, and the various types of support for learning needed in workplaces, amongst other aspects.

SAQA-DUT PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH INTO ARTICULATION

The SAQA-DUT project was designed to provide extensive information and evidence to support the implementation of the Minister's Articulation Policy. It includes six in-depth case studies, the National Articulation Baseline Study, and building the 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2014) – for the relationship-building needed for strengthening articulation. The over-arching research questions were: 'What successful models exist in South Africa for learners to transition between TVET Colleges and HEIs, between UoTs and traditional universities, and between Colleges or HEIs on one hand, and workplaces on the other? Why are these models successful? How can they be taken to scale?' The project sought to (a) identify, analyse and document good practice models and relationships for learner transitioning, (b) identify and explore the potential for developing collaborative models in three types of articulation scenarios: 'developed', 'emerging' and 'latent'[4], and (c) identify the nature of activities and support that institutions, staff, and learners need for successful transitioning.

NATIONAL ARTICULATION BASELINE STUDY

The larger study of which the National Articulation Baseline survey is part combines five theoretical frameworks. The first is 'ecosystems theory' (Pillari, 2002); the second 'relational agency' (Edwards, 2010); the third 'grounded theory' (Charmaz, 2006; De Vos, 2002), and the fourth and fifth respectively, the ideas of boundary-making, boundary zones, boundary-crossing, and individuals' experiences of boundaries on one hand, and Bhaskar's idea of identifying and 'absenting absences'

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[2] The ideas of 'boundary zones', 'boundary-making and boundary-crossing practices' and 'transitioning along learning pathways' are taken from SAQA-Rhodes University Partnership Research reported by Lotz-Sisitka (2015).
[3] Related articles showing how institutions can transform towards being increasingly flexible in order to support individual learning pathways (See for example Walters 2015a; 2015b).
[4] Developed models are those in which there are articulation-related structures and processes, and learners are transitioning through the system; emerging models are those in which articulation structures and processes are being set up; latent models are those which were functioning and have for some reason, stalled.

on the other (Lotz-Sisitka, 2015) (See the National Articulation Baseline Study Report, SAQA, 2018).

Method and sampling

The National Articulation Baseline survey was conducted between August and December 2016. Given the time frame available, it was decided to focus on public entities: all 50 public TVET Colleges and all 26 public HEIs were included in the survey. For the HEIs, the survey instrument was emailed together with a formal invitation to participate, from SAQA's Chief Executive Officer, to the relevant Deputy Vice-Chancellors or Registrars. For the TVET Colleges, the survey questionnaires and invitation letters were emailed to the College Principals. Up to five follow-ups were made in each instance to enable the researchers to obtain the levels of clarity and detail needed.

Response rates

All 50 of the TVET Colleges (100%) and 25 of the 26 HEIs (98%) completed the surveys.

Analysis and results

The analyses and results of the National Articulation Baseline Survey are presented in the National Articulation Baseline Survey Report (SAQA-DUT, 2018). The results showed that articulation is embedded across the institutions to differing extents. Also, that there are three province-wide articulation initiatives being implemented. The following are highlights from the findings:

- Regarding **understandings of articulation**, it was found that across the public HEIs and TVET Colleges, there was relatively high awareness of *systemic articulation* and *specific articulation.* There appeared to be less understanding of the need for institutions to be flexible in their support of learners as they transition along their particular *individual pathways*.

- Regarding identifying **existing articulation initiatives and success models**: just over a third (17) of the TVET Colleges claimed to have existing formal articulation arrangements while half (25) claim to be participating in informal arrangements; seven are involved in a combination of formal and informal arrangements. Just under half (11) of the HEIs are participating in formal articulation arrangements; six are involved in informal initiatives. Altogether all 50 of the TVET Colleges reported engagement in some articulation activities; over two thirds of public HEIs did so.

- Re **province-wide articulation models involving systemic and specific articulation, and the support of individual learners:** at least three relatively large-scale province-wide articulation arrangements were identified through the survey, and are seen by participants as being successful; these need to be documented and replicated. The same goes for the additional **successful articulation arrangements** anchored around a single institution.

- **Articulation champions:** The good practice models identified rely on an established articulation *office*, as opposed to an incumbent *officer*. They also include 'resourceful leadership' (Edwards, 2014) that is able to forge meaningful collaborations across perceived divides.

- **The centrality of lifelong learners.** In terms of what can be taken to scale, the first is a return to the centrality of the lifelong learners in articulation initiatives. In the marketing of articulation – the pathways and the supportive environments that enable these pathways must be foregrounded, rather than the institutions themselves being at the centre of marketing initiatives. Institutions of learning need to be flexible in their provision of support for lifelong learners by putting in place policies, structures, processes, and resources to ensure the continuation and sustainability of rendering needs-based flexible support. This positioning could ameliorate what is described as the 'epistemic injustice' (injustices relating to knowledge).

- **The tracking of learner transitioning.** Just over half (28) of the colleges and just under a third (8) of the HEIs track learners. However, the information currently being tracked differs across institutions. Systematic data collection and reporting requirements are needed to support articulation, and 'Articulation Reporting Guidelines' are needed to facilitate common understandings and requirements around tracking and consistent articulation-related data capturing and reporting across the system.

- **'Developed', 'emerging' and 'latent' articulation scenarios were found.** These three categories of articulation practices terms were developed for the purposes of this study to differentiate between 1) initiatives being successfully implemented (Developed); ;2) initiatives in the process of being set up (Emerging) ; and initiatives that were started but are now reported to be dormant (Latent). Respondents were deliberately not asked to categorise the scenario(s) in their institutions. The categories were used in the analysis of the survey data to differentiate between different levels/layers of articulation practice (see Table 1).

Table 1: Reported articulation as seen through the lens of the three types of articulation scenarios

Types of institutions	Developed articulation scenarios	Emerging articulation scenarios	Latent articulation scenarios	Not sure	Total numbers of articulation scenarios[5]
HEIs	8	9	7	1	**25**
TVET Colleges	8	29	13	0	**50**
Total numbers of articulation scenarios	16	38	20	1	**75**

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[5] Some HEIs and TVET Colleges reported more than one articulation initiative, where the scenarios of the initiatives differed - the numbers of scenarios therefore do not refer to the numbers of Colleges and HEIs that responded to the survey.

- **Taking developed articulation scenarios to scale**

In all, articulated pathways were reported as follows:

a) N4-6 qualifications → workplace (vertical articulation within NQF Sub-Framework);
b) N4-6 qualifications → National Diploma[6] → workplace (vertical articulation within NQF Sub-Framework);
c) N4-6 qualifications → National Diploma → Advanced Diploma → workplace (vertical articulation within NQF Sub-Framework);
d) N4-6 qualifications → Trade Tests → workplace (horizontal articulation within NQF Sub-Framework);
e) N4-6 qualifications → National N Diploma → HEI Degree Studies, where the Advanced Diploma is replacing the B Tech Degree (vertical articulation across NQF Sub-Frameworks);
f) NCV4 → workplace;
g) NCV4 → N4-6 to the pathways shown in (a)-(e) (horizontal articulation across NQF Sub-Frameworks followed by vertical articulation);
h) NCV4 → Higher Certificate (diagonal articulation across NQF Sub-Frameworks);
i) NCV4 → Higher Certificate → National Diploma (diagonal articulation across NQF Sub-Frameworks followed by vertical articulation);
j) Level 5 Occupational Certificate → National Diploma (diagonal articulation across NQF Sub-Frameworks); and
k) Higher Certificate → National Diploma (vertical articulation within NQF Sub-Framework).

Among other articulation scenarios, the following are understood to be approaching the 'developed articulation scenario' stage and could be taken to scale:
- interdisciplinary Postgraduate Diplomas specifically designed to include several disciplines in order to broaden articulation possibilities;
- articulation arrangements between the National N Diplomas and cognate Advanced Diplomas;
- the adoption of a systemic (provincial) approach to articulation focusing on critical areas with strong potential for success; and
- an articulation arrangement between an HEI and an NGO operating as an 'matric school'[7] for 'second chance school leaving learners'.

- **A comment on the alignment of the TVET College and HEI responses.**

  It is worth noting that the TVET College descriptions of the formal inter-institutional arrangements which they have brokered were comparable to the HEI descriptions of their formal inter-institutional arrangements.

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[6] TVET Colleges award National N Diplomas to students who after being awarded the N4-N6 Certificates, complete an 18-month internship in an approved workplace. These N Diplomas are not to be confused with the National Diplomas offered by UoTs, which in compliance with the HEQSF framework are being phased out and replaced by HEQSF-aligned Diplomas.

[7] Colloquial term used within the school.

- **The value of 'articulated units of learning' that are parts of qualifications.**

  The practice of using modules, unit standards or other units of learning that are parts of full qualifications *by design* as part of a 'ladder of units of learning', is another scenario that could be taken to scale.

- **Perceptions of the extent of success or otherwise, of articulation initiatives implemented.**

  Overall, 30 (61%) of the Colleges rated their articulation initiatives as being 'moderately successful', 'successful' or 'highly successful', and 12 (48%) of the HEIs did so. Five (10%) of the Colleges and none of the HEIs reported 'mixed successes'. Supporting reasons were given.

2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following points summarise the recommendations from the National Articulation Baseline Study.

Recommendation 1

Identify, further investigate and document the key enablers of the successful 'developed articulation models'. This should be done using a holistic approach that captures the whole 'ecology' of the initiative, including boundary-crossing mechanisms and the relational agency support required.

Recommendation 2

That SAQA should host national learning events to promote system-wide sharing and learning.

Recommendation 3

To identify articulation champions to share and advocate successful practices. This recommendation could be incorporated into the National Implementation Plan for the White Paper for PSET, the Guidelines for Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and Work-Based Learning (WBL), and other planning documents by providing for:
  (a) establishing articulation champions in the form of articulation offices, officers, or other mechanisms to build capacity in institutions of learning, and provide the necessary resources to support this function;
  (b) building capacity for Work Integrated Learning (WIL)/Work-Based Learning (WBL) coordinators, which need to be a human resource requirement at TVET and Community Education and Training (CET) Colleges, as they currently exist at UoTs; and
  (c) developing and sustaining entrepreneurship and 'intra-preneurship' hubs across the system.

Recommendation 4

Design and implement a national campaign involving <u>collaborative relationships and communities of practice both provincially and nationally,</u> to enhance understandings, respect, curriculum alignment work, advocacy at key transition points, and incentivisation towards formal agreements.

Recommendation 5

Advance, strengthen and resource the <u>collaborative models in the three categories of of articulation scenarios described above, in systematic ways.</u>

Recommendation 6

<u>Focus on particular learning pathways/fields/transition points, in order to strengthen the pathways.</u>

Recommendation 7

Develop <u>systematic data collection and reporting requirements and guidelines for institutions to track and report on articulation practices</u> - at national level - in order to facilitate common understandings around tracking and consistent articulation-related reporting across the system.

3. **ENABLERS IDENTIFIED, FOR GUIDING, PROMOTING & BETTERING ARTICULATION INITIATIVES**

The following enablers or boundary-crossing mechanisms were identified in the National Articulation Baseline Study, and further elaborated at the NQF Seminar on Articulation hosted by SAQA on 30 January 2018.

ENABLER 1

The **deliberate and conscious development of collaborative relationships by both HEI and TVET Colleges** in order to: (1) **seek to understand** qualifications/ programmes/ learners within and across types of institutions; (2) **deliberately show respect** for individuals and their work in other institutions; (3) **understand and align** curricula and programmes to facilitate transitioning; and (4) **advocate** different learning pathways and **provide advice to** learners at early and key points, on the subject requirements of pursing specific learning-and-work pathways. Aligning learning to the **Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework** (HEQSF) assists articulation.

ENABLER 2

Vigorous advocacy of the NQF regulatory framework, together with efforts by all the different role-players in the system, to understand the different parts of the regulatory system. Role-players include but are not limited to SAQA, Quality Council, DHET and DBE officials, public and private institutions of learning, professional bodies, provincial and national government departments and other

structures, NGOs, and empliyers. The **provision of sufficient work placement opportunities is essential, as are entrepreneurship** and **'intra-preneurship'**[8] **hubs**.

ENABLER 3

The **establishment, commitment to, and implementation of, formal articulation agreements** – in the form of either MoUs or MoAs, CAT arrangements, place reservation, RPL and other mechanisms.

ENABLER 4

Inclusive admission criteria – which include HEIs admitting learners with N4-6 and NCV4 as well as with National Senior Certificate (NSC) qualifications, providing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), recognising all appropriate types of learning, and admitting learners over the age of 23 who do not hold an NQF Level 4 qualification.

ENABLER 5

The provision of **quality teaching and learning**, and **seeking high learner achievement levels** – where the quality of provision includes a wide range of learner support initiatives, including the scaffolding of the content of learning within and between learning offerings. Flexible provisioning of education and training is necessary – flexibility in admin systems, in learning and teaching methods and scheduling, in assignments and assessment, and in access processes. Anyone can refer to the NLRD which states the minimum entry requirements for NQF qualifications. The use of RPL is strongly encouraged.

ENABLER 6

Career development advice from the very early stages of learning pathways, whether at school, TVET College, Community College, HEI or elsewhere, and most importantly at transition points. Students must be advised about 'possible steps' and 'destination possibilities'.

ENABLER 7

Articulation focussed on *particular* learning pathways/ fields/ programmes/ transition points – such as transitioning between N4-6 programmes or NCV qualifications and cognate learning programmes in HEIs, and others. The survey results showed clearly the importance of retaining **NATED** qualifications in the qualifications/ programme mix. Collaboration cannot just be for the sake of collaboration – focus areas are needed. A focus on articulation from HEIs or TVET Colleges to professional designations is also needed.

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[8] 'Intra-preneurship' as a concept and practice has been identified in at least one case study in the SAQA-DUT Partnership Research into articulation. Intrapreneurs are employees identified for skills development training that will include training for entrepreneurship, with the first opportunity to demonstrate and practice their enterprise occurring *within* the workplace (in-house context for the entrepreneurial activities). As each of these employees and their enterprises grow, a formal relationship evolves in which the enterprise becomes a supplier to the employer, or part of the employer's supply chain.

ENABLER 8

Vigorous advocacy of the regulatory framework, in all sub-sectors, led by SAQA.

ENABLER 9

The **availability of critical resources**, including human resources and funding, to support articulation.

ENABLER 10

Additional research to support articulation, where the research is documented and widely shared across NQF organisations.

Revised after the NQF Seminar on Articulation, hosted by SAQA at Kopanong Hotel and Conference Centre, Benoni, Gauteng, 30 January 2018.