NQF Implementation Framework 2021-25

Foreword

SAQA and the Quality Councils are tasked with ensuring the further development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This is the 3rd NQF implementation Framework that SAQA has developed and monitored its implementation.

The NQF Implementation Framework allows for NQF organisations to work on a common agreed-upon road map for implementation that is accessible to all NQF partners and stakeholders. The current NQF Implementation Framework builds on the work and the priorities set out in previous versions, as well as the recommendations and objectives emanating from the NQF Act Implementation Evaluation Improvement Plan and the 2017 NQF Impact Study.

Implementation of the NQF requires careful thought and planning. This Implementation Framework provides a broad roadmap for the implementation of the NQF that includes:

    a. Developing a NQF-wide automated end-to-end process for the registration of qualifications;

    b. The NQF partners finalising the standards and criteria that all policies and guidelines developed under the NQF Act should meet;

    c. Developing and implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the NQF; and

    d. Minimising areas of duplication in key regulatory processes and adopting a risk-based approach to regulation.

South Africa's NQF was one of the first established NQFs in the world, and still one of a few that boasts three sub-frameworks. SAQA continues to participate in international debates and conversations of NQFs and is currently wrestling with the idea of micro-credentials and its impact on our thinking about NQFs. The SAQA Board is also re-looking at SAQA's role in implementing the NQF versus the role of the different Quality Councils and professional bodies. These debates may re-shape the manner in which SAQA performs its functions and our thinking about the NQF in the coming months and years.

I thank the Minister of Higher Education Science and Innovation (HESI) for the trust he has placed in SAQA and the NQF partners to further develop and implement the NQF. We look forward to the shared vision and coordinated efforts of the NQF partners in ensuring that the NQF provides a relevant and accessible service to South African public.

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Draft NQF Implementation Framework 2020/21-24/25

Introduction and context

SAQA and the Quality Councils must seek to achieve the objectives of the NQF by:

a. developing, fostering and maintaining an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements;
b. ensuring that South African qualifications meet appropriate criteria, determined by the Minister as contemplated in section 8, and are internationally comparable; and
c. ensuring that South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality.

Purpose of the NQF Implementation Framework

The NQF Act, 2008 as amended, requires the organisations tasked with implementing the NQF to do so in a transparent and integrated manner. SAQA must, in order to advance the objectives of the NQF, oversee the implementation of the NQF in accordance with an implementation framework prepared by SAQA after consultation with the Quality Councils (NQF Act 13(1)(e)). The NQF Implementation Framework allows for NQF organisations to work on a common agreed-upon road map for implementation that is accessible to all NQF partners and stakeholders. The NQF Implementation Framework 2020/21–24/25 builds on the work and the priorities set out in the 2014/15-2019/20 NQF Implementation Framework, as well as the recommendations and objectives emanating from the NQF Act Implementation Evaluation Improvement Plan and the 2017 NQF Impact Study.

There is significant overlap between the NQF Improvement Plan Objectives, the 2017 NQF Impact Study recommendations and the priorities for the NQF Implementation Framework proposed for the five-year period.

Priorities for the period 2020/21-2024/25

Priority 1- Quality Assurance and Qualifications

Quality assurance can be used as a tool for achieving greater transparency and efficiency, and in so doing instil deeper trust in the NQF. Efforts are required to strengthen areas where quality assurance frameworks and processes exist and focus on establishing them where they are not yet present. The following priorities have been identified:

a. Quality assure programme accreditation processes to improve efficiency;
b. Develop and review frameworks, manuals, guidelines and practice standards for the different quality assurance functions and align where necessary;
c. Develop, quality assure, register and implement qualifications for NASCA, GETCA, GEC and ECD;

d. Automate key processes, from application to the registration of qualifications across the NQF; and

e. Develop a system for an NQF-wide automated end-to-end process for the registration of qualifications. Ideally this system should be accessible by members of the public, so that they can track the progress of all applications.

Priority 2- Legislative and policy review

Policy coherence is critical for the successful implementation and further development of the NQF. The alignment of Quality Council policies to SAQA and DHET policies will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the system. The following activities will assist in moving towards greater policy coherence:

a. DHET, in consultation with DBE, SAQA, and the Quality Councils, must finalise the standards and criteria that all policies and guidelines developed under the NQF Act should meet;

b. Review and publish amended Sub-Framework Acts, as well as the associated quality assurance procedures where required;

c. SAQA and the Quality Councils must review their RPL and CAT Policies and the Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework and monitor implementation;

d. Review and strengthen the Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications, considering the nuances of each sub-framework. Following this, SAQA, after consultation with the Quality Councils must issue guidelines clarifying what a part-qualification is in the context of each sub-framework;

e. Ensure that all Quality Councils' policies align with SAQA and DHET policies, taking account of the nuances in each sub-framework; and

f. To ensure the aligned, system-wide implementation of RPL and CAT, it is recommended that SAQA facilitates information-sharing events with NQF stakeholders to deepen understandings and agree on an 'Implementation Programme for RPL, CAT, and Articulation'.

Priority 3- Research informing the implementation and further development of the NQF

Research can provide the basis for evidence-based decision making. In many cases, research outcomes directly impact the implementation and further development of the NQF. There is a move towards greater collaboration and synergies in research among the NQF family, facilitated by joint research platforms such as DHET's Research Forum. The NQF organisations can continue this work by doing the following:

a. Conduct ongoing research into the implementation of the NQF and its sub-frameworks;

b. Reflect on key findings of previous research studies, develop and implement action plans and track progress where appropriate;

c. Conduct research into articulation towards the development of policy and guidelines for promoting articulation within each Sub-Framework, and between Sub-Frameworks; and

d. Host joint NQF research colloquia and seminars annually for dialogue and information sharing.

Priority 4- NQF stakeholder engagement and information sharing

In order to expand the reach and impact of the NQF, there must be a common understanding of the broad context within which it operates, and meaningful engagements with key stakeholders. Several tools can be employed to facilitate this, including stakeholder analyses to create a better understanding of the context, and information sharing and advocacy initiatives to create opportunities for bi-lateral communication. This will be achieved through the following means:

a. Establish appropriate platforms for regular information sharing with relevant stakeholders;
b. Establish and foster joint NQF advocacy and communication campaigns;
c. Clarify and define the roles and responsibilities of statutory and non-statutory professional bodies;
d. Review and reconsider the blanket requirement for a workplace training component in all qualifications and part-qualifications in the OQSF, and expand opportunities for authentic work experience;
e. The QCTO makes efforts to ensure:

    (i) learner support to navigate barriers for learners studying towards occupational qualifications; and
    (ii) capacity-building and performance-enhancing work, to increase its ability to coordinate the components of the OQSF system; and

f. To address GFETQSF stakeholder difficulties, Umalusi (in collaboration with SAQA):
    (i) adds criteria and guidelines for implementation to its Assessment and CAT policies;
    (ii) clarifies the terms 'Credit Exemption', 'Credit Recognition', and the operationalisation of these terms; and
    (iii) addresses articulation pathways for adults – e.g. through implementing the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA), or offering the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in different ways (through flexible learning).

Priority 5- Funding

A clear and sustainable funding strategy is critical for the long-term survival of the NQF. For instance, the lack of funding has emerged as an important barrier to Flexible Learning Pathways and Provisioning in South Africa. Funding is required for the mainstreaming of key initiatives and practices, without which, organisations are unable to institutionalise them. The following areas need to be addressed:

a. The DHET in collaboration with NQF bodies should provide clear guidance and direction on the funding of the overall NQF funding system;
b. The DHET should review the funding model of the NQF to facilitate its implementation and further development, taking into consideration specific barriers linked to resources;

c. Quality Councils should determine whether more cost-effective risk-based approaches to quality assurance can be adopted, particularly in cases where the cost of compliance and enforcement can be high; and

d. DHET, in collaboration with SAQA and the QCs, should develop a proposal for the sustainable funding of RPL, if RPL is to become mainstreamed.

Priority 6- Records of the NQF

The NQF MIS incorporating the NLRD, is the official record-keeping system of the NQF. There are obvious data gaps in the system, that the Quality Councils should fill. Even though each QC has its own record-keeping system, a coordinated and comprehensive record-keeping system will improve the transparency and efficiency of NQF service delivery. Several steps can be taken towards this end:

a. Put systems and processes in place for the direct the submission of data from private and public higher education institutions directly to the CHE;

b. Consolidate the HEQC Information System (HEQCIS) at the CHE;

c. Develop and implement a system for collecting achievement data directly from public universities;

d. Complete the MIS for all occupational qualifications; and

e. All Quality Councils must load their data on the NQF MIS (incorporating the NLRD) within 30 days of completing their quality assurance process.

Priority 7- Monitoring and evaluation of the system

Monitoring and evaluation is a complex but necessary function. In the NQF space it will provide insights into how challenges can be addressed and successes replicated. The evidence obtained from this process will improve service delivery and therefore deepen its impact. The following actions can be taken to facilitate this process:

a. Develop and Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the NQF;

b. SAQA must use the data from the NQF MIS to track and monitor policy changes and developments across the NQF;

c. QCs must intensify the monitoring of accredited institutions and assessment bodies; and

d. The offering of unaccredited or unregistered qualifications must be closely monitored. The DHET and DBE must take action against national and international public and private providers who offer unaccredited or unregistered qualifications in South Africa.

Priority 8- Ongoing implementation and further refinement of a System of Collaboration between SAQA and the Quality Councils

The System of Collaboration was developed to assist SAQA and the Quality Councils to work together towards the promotion and implementation of the NQF. The System of Collaboration describes how SAQA and the Quality Councils should work together and the channels that should be followed in the case of a dispute. One way of facilitating the implementation of the NQF is through shared platforms for engagement as well as through

institutional partnerships and arrangements. A clear delineation of roles and responsibilities to eliminate duplication is critical. Ongoing implementation and further refinement will take place in the following ways:

a. Given the current resource-constrained environment, SAQA and the Quality Councils must work together to enhance the efficiency of implementation by minimising areas of duplication in key regulatory processes and adopting risk-based approaches to regulation;
b. Establish monitoring mechanisms and report on the functioning of the System of Collaboration; and
c. The DHET, in collaboration with the NQF bodies, should organise forums or platforms to allow for collaboration between public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), TVET colleges and Skills Development Providers to support the design of qualifications that can articulate from NQF Level 4 to Level 5 across the sub-frameworks.

Conclusion

The NQF Implementation Framework 2020/21-24/25 has been developed to focus the work of SAQA and the QCs towards achieving their goal of further developing and implementing the NQF. By the end of the five-year period, the following would have been achieved:

e. An NQF-wide automated end-to-end process for the registration of qualifications will have been developed;
f. The NQF partners will have finalised the standards and criteria that all policies and guidelines developed under the NQF Act should meet;
g. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the NQF will have been developed and implemented; and
h. Areas of duplication in key regulatory processes will be minimised and a risk-based approach to regulation will have been adopted.