ENHANCING THE EFFICACY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Joint Policy Statement by the
Ministers of Education and Labour

Introduction

[1]   This is the first formal statement of government's policy on the implementation of the NQF since the historic passage of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995.

[2]   This statement concludes a process, initiated in 2001, of assessing how the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) can be improved. The process has taken long but important issues have had to be resolved.

[3]   Since the review began concerned individuals, organisations, public entities and departments of state have contributed valuable analyses and critiques of the NQF and its implementation. Two substantial published documents, each including a range of proposals, have benefited from such contributions and provided a focus for further public debate.

[4]   The new policy retains the original objectives of the NQF but envisages changes in its organisational structures to improve the efficiency and efficacy of implementation. Such changes reflect the experience gained by the Ministries of Education and Labour in carrying the political responsibility for NQF implementation and the many and varied submissions in response to the two previous documents. They are designed to address the allocation of responsibility, resolve tensions among important role-players, and simplify the NQF apparatus, in order to speed up the achievement of NQF objectives. Many important bodies and interests, both public and private, are involved in NQF implementation. All will be affected by the changes once the new policy has been given legislative effect. Good leadership and goodwill will be required on all fronts in order to ensure a well-managed transition.

Our NQF

[5]   The South African NQF was conceived in the democratic labour movement, later supported by elements in the business community and by the education constituency. Its first objective was to deal with the legacies of job reservation and retrogressive and discriminatory training practices in the South African labour force by creating ladders of opportunity or learning and career pathways. Closing skills gaps,

improving equity, and achieving greater labour market efficiency and higher levels of productivity were assumed to be outcomes of a national qualifications framework.

[6]   The NQF concept was subsequently extended to embrace a universal system of quality assured standards and qualifications embracing all education, training and skills development at all levels, both in the workplace and in learning institutions. This comprehensive approach was embodied in the SAQA Act, 1995.

[7]   Typically, national qualifications frameworks elsewhere have originated in the skills or vocational education domain. Some have remained there. It is common for other NQFs to maintain separate standards setting processes for industry sectors, schools and higher education, with some inter-penetration by vocational standards particularly at the further and higher education levels. In South Africa, the comprehensive approach embodied in the SAQA Act, 1995, was unique in the world when it was conceived and remains unique in its architecture.

[8]   Since 1995, the National Qualifications Framework has become an essential instrument in the construction of a high quality, responsive South African education, training and skills development system that serves our democracy and social and economic development. However, all social institutions benefit from renewed mandates and revised procedures that take experience into account. This policy will enable all role-players to pursue the objectives of the NQF with clarity and vigour within a simplified organisational structure.

[9]   The NQF is one of the innovations of the new democratic government aimed at transforming the education, training and skills development system. It is an idea and a set of institutions and practices that have been developed collectively in order to achieve certain agreed objectives

[10]   The objectives of the NQF are to:

- create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- enhance the quality of education, training and skills development;
- accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

[11]   These objectives remain valid and should not be changed.

[12]   While the NQF is subject to constant negotiation and re-negotiation among interested parties, it is not a spontaneous social activity. It is first and last a matter of national policy, designed to serve the national

purpose of democratic transformation, transacted in our government and Parliament and enabled and constrained by national law. That is why the review of NQF implementation has been so important and has been taken so seriously.

[13]   The newness of our democratic institutions and the high expectations our people have of the NQF has made the South African review particularly difficult and important. In the end it is the duty of the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour to cut through the doubt and incipient confusion and set out a clear line of advance that will protect the gains we have already made, uphold the objectives of the NQF, and provide a sturdy platform for future development. This is what the revised policy seeks to achieve.

Achievements to date

[14]   At the heart of the construction of the NQF has been the desire to take an integrated approach to education, training and skills development in a variety of settings, including formal education, training and skills development institutions and the workplace. The scope of South Africa's NQF is fully comprehensive, and its objectives are universally accepted by all role-players. It has assisted in reinforcing the importance of outcomes-based learning and quality assurance throughout the education, training and skills development system.

[15]   The South African NQF system is unique internationally as it does not exclude any level or area of learning. For that reason the design of the NQF and its institutions must be hospitable to a range of different learning cultures and practices. There is a danger that over-emphasis on any one form of learning will devalue another. It is important that learning practitioners at different levels and in different areas are regarded as colleagues and potential collaborators rather than competitors, each working in a field that is valuable and necessary to human welfare.

[16]   The Ministers emphasise that general and formative learning for children, young people and adults creates a vital foundation for all subsequent learning and skills development, whether in institutions or the workplace. Equally the advancement of higher learning in the sciences, technology, arts, humanities and social sciences is essential for our national well being. Our education, training and skills development system must continue to value, support and develop all fields and forms of learning, particularly those that have relevance for the country's scientific and technological competitiveness, for work and employment and for meeting the nation's social challenges. An integrated approach to education and training should thus not blur the important distinctions between different forms of learning and their

specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education, training and skills development.

Our NQF in international perspective

[17] The NQF idea originated in Scotland, England and New Zealand twenty years ago and was taken up early by Australia and South Africa. Despite its relatively recent origin the NQF phenomenon has spread rapidly. Most NQFs worldwide are in their infancy or still in conceptualisation and only a handful of countries have relatively mature NQF systems. Nevertheless, the development of national qualifications frameworks is supported by inter-governmental bodies like the ILO, UNESCO and the European Commission, which regard them as important vehicles for harmonising qualifications within and among nations, assuring their quality and enhancing the mobility of learners and workers.

[18] Qualification Frameworks differ in their coverage and structure. Some cover only vocational education and training. Others omit higher education. Some maintain separate NQFs for different sectors, which may or may not be related to one another. If there is a trend it is toward inclusivity, but inclusivity takes different forms. It is common for separate sectoral qualification ladders to be linked by agreement between sectors about equivalent levels and credit value. Typically, the higher education qualifications framework remains the responsibility of that sector.

[19] By contrast South Africa's NQF was designed from the start to be fully inclusive of all learning in General, Further and Higher Education and in both institutional and workplace contexts, with one set of qualification types and level descriptors for institutional- and workplace-based qualifications at all levels of the framework. The complexity of implementing such a comprehensive framework in part led to the initiation of the review.

The Review

[20] In 2001 the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour appointed a Study Team to assess and review the implementation of the NQF to and improve its efficacy and efficiency.

[21] The Ministers initiated the review in response to a range of concerns regarding the unfolding mechanisms and instruments used to realise the objectives of the NQF. The Study Team was required to examine:

- Relevant and contemporary international developments on national qualifications frameworks with reference to policies, regulatory frameworks and implementation procedures and their implications for NQF practice and future directions.

- The match between policy objectives and outcomes (as outlined in relevant policies and legislation), and the experiences and attitudes of education, training and skills development providers and learners with the implementation of the NQF.
- The extent to which the South African Qualifications Authority has put in place the appropriate and relevant policies, procedures, delivery systems, other resources and capacities essential for the establishment of the NQF and for implementing relevant mandates of the Ministers of Education and Labour on education, training and skills development, and how these can be improved. The study should examine and advise in particular on how to address the concerns among some key social partners and stakeholders about an apparent proliferation of bodies and procedures, and an apparent fragmentation of roles and responsibilities in the areas of quality assurance and national standards development.
- Any other obstacles, real or perceived, to streamlining the implementation of NQF

[22] Stakeholders, including the sponsoring government departments made representation to the Study Team, which included the following concerns:

- The proliferation of NQF bodies and structures especially for standards generation of quality assurance, leading to confusion and duplication of effort and responsibility.
- The architecture of the NQF, embracing policies, regulations, procedures, structures and language, is experienced as unduly complex, confusing, time consuming and unsustainable.
- Denudation of Government's authority over NQF policy and regulations leading to conflict between some stakeholder interests and confusion over Government policy.
- Lack of synergy between some Government priorities and the direction of NQF implementation.
- Misplaced application of the "stakeholder principle" leading to failure to give experts in qualifications design and quality assurance their due.
- Lack of recognition of the diversity of approaches and practices within the education, training and skills development system resulting in the design of an NQF architecture with a "one size fits all" approach.

[23] The Study Team reported to the two Ministers in May 2002. Public comments were received at the end of 2002. In response, the Department of Education and Department of Labour published the NQF Consultative Document in July 2003.

[24] In publishing the consultative document, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour accepted the following key recommendations of the Study Team:

[25] Standards and qualifications

- The NQF should be based on 10 levels, reflecting the qualification requirements of the respective NQF bands and taking account of international comparability.
- Qualifications must be designed as a whole and should be fit for their respective purposes
- Both "unit standards-based" and "whole qualifications" are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based qualifications design.
- The twelve National Standards Bodies established by SAQA should be disestablished in a properly phased manner and their functions allocated to designated structures.

[26] Quality assurance

- The number of ETQAs should be limited.
- The current quality assurance model should be modified to emphasise an integrated partnership approach to quality, which would rely on five main processes: self-evaluation by providers; institutional accreditation; the ongoing monitoring of provider activities; the quality assurance of learning achievements; and quality audits.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) implementation should be accorded priority, provided with appropriate incentives and targets and speeded up through the simplification of standards setting and quality assurance arrangements.

[27] Leadership and governance

- SAQA should become an apex national organisation responsible for leadership in the field of quality assurance and qualifications, as well as being highly focussed on its supportive and facilitative role. This should be reflected in the staff calibre and intellectual culture of the organisation.
- The SAQA Board should be reconstituted, to comprise not more than 15 members.

[28] The Consultative Document went further to propose a revised architecture for NQF implementation, based on structures responsible for Qualifications and Quality Assurance, known as Quality Councils or "QC's". Three such structures were proposed, for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Trades, Occupations and Professions.

Response to the Consultative Document

[29] The Consultative Document elicited a diverse range of views and positions from concerned individuals, organisations, public entities and departments of state. The Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour accepted the concept of Quality Councils, but agreed that the proposal to establish a QC for Trades, Occupations and Professions (TOP) required further consideration. The notion of a TOP QC-type structure raised some concern about the danger of creating "silos" of learning. In addition, it was felt that there were too many ETQAs already, and that it might be a mistake to create another. However, the need for a suitable structure to deal with work based learning was emphasised by many respondents. Others supported the idea of a TOP QC type of body that would coordinate, simplify and streamline the work of the SETA ETQAs – such a body would increase cost-effectiveness and reduce bureaucracy.

[30] Universally, the education and training systems are divided according to cognitive bands. The South African NQF is also arranged according to bands, especially in relation to quality assurance. However, given the comprehensive nature of our NQF, it is recognised that is important that the design of the NQF and its institutions must be hospitable to a range of different learning cultures and practices. There is a danger that over-emphasis on any one form of learning will devalue another. Similarly an integrated approach to education, and training should not blur the important distinctions between different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education and training. It is within this context that the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour considered the establishment of a Quality Council for Trades and Occupations to respond to the unique circumstances and philosophies acquisition of skills and specialised knowledge required to achieve competence in trades, occupations and para-professions. This requires extending the traditional notion of education and training to include skills development.

Strengthening NQF policy and implementation

[31] In response to the recommendations and comments to the review of NQF implementation, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour have developed this joint policy statement on the National Qualifications Framework. The policy aims at making the NQF implementation more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the country. The revised policy retains the original objectives of the NQF, including the principle of an integrated approach to education and training, but envisages changes in its organisational structures to improve the efficiency and efficacy of NQF implementation. Such

changes reflect the experience gained by the Ministries of Education and Labour in carrying the political responsibility for NQF implementation.

[32] Simplicity, clarity, flexibility and trust should be the hallmarks of successful NQF implementation. The policy provides a model for NQF implementation that will be coherent, clear and unambiguous as to the roles of the government, the respective statutory bodies responsible for advice or implementation, and other participants in NQF processes. It simplifies the NQF apparatus, in order to speed up the achievement of NQF objectives. Given the significant changes in NQF architecture, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour intend to closely monitor its implementation, especially with regard to the quality assurance of skills development and work based learning.

An integrated approach to education, training and skills development

[33] The NQF is founded on the principle of an integrated approach to education and training. The initial policy, expressed in the RDP base document, has been a reference point for all new developments in our national learning system since 1994.

[34] NQF stakeholders regard the principle of integration as an essential feature and goal of the NQF. Integration suggests a holistic view of learning, in which conceptual and applied knowledge each has value and esteem. It indicates the importance of bridges between the workplace and the classroom, so that learners and workers can cross to either side as they advance their education and careers. The principle of integration has been closely related to the democratic project since it affirms the essential dignity of all forms of socially useful learning, and it is seen as an important lever for the redress of past inequalities in the provision of education, training and skills development and in overcoming discrimination in the workplace by supporting skills development and employment equity. In the words of the first White Paper on Education and Training (March 1995):

[35] An integrated approach to education and training, linked to the development of a new National Qualification Framework (NQF) based on a system of credits for learning outcomes achieved, will encourage creative work on the design of curricula and the recognition of learning attainments wherever education and training are offered. It will open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge (acquired informally or by work experience) has not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised for admission to further learning, or employment purposes.

Whole qualifications and unit standards

[36]   Any uncertainty over the role and significance of unit standards in relation to qualifications must be removed. Presently both qualifications and unit standards must comply with national criteria in order to be registered on the NQF. This will continue to be the case.

[37]   In addition, there is room in the NQF for other units of learning such as modules. Unit standards and learning modules leading to the achievement of exit outcomes have particular utility in the workplace and learning institutions respectively, where they enable a person's learning to be assessed and advanced in incremental steps.

[38]   The need for unit standards is clear. It refers to something less than a qualification for which credits (or some form of recognition of learning achievement) can be given. The principle of having some kind(s) of nationally recognised building blocks which support the notion of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and recognition of prior learning (RPL) is indispensable to the goals of access, redress and transformation. It is not disputed that this must be situated within a framework that prescribes rules of combination for eventually achieving a qualification.

[39]   However, there are many misunderstandings about the implications of aligning learning programmes to unit standards. Learning outcomes can be conceptualised in different ways, for example in terms of delivery e.g. completion of modules in training programme which lead to the achievement of specified outcomes, or in terms of demonstrated occupational competence including workplace experience. Different contexts require different kinds of assessment.

[40]   Criticisms of unit standards are often based on examples of bad unit standards writing practice, leading to an assumption that such practice is the norm. In fact, examples of poor practice can be found in all parts of the system, and the constructive approach is to improve the practice rather than to attack the system. The terminology is not of key significance and there is no objection to different parts of the education, training and skills development system using the terms most appropriate to their context e.g. module outcomes, assessment standards, unit standards, standards of professional competence.

[41]   The arguments for and against 'whole qualifications' also revolve around different conceptions of unit standards-based qualifications. The primary concern that is expressed about the latter is that they are perceived to be accumulative – that as soon as a given number of credits have been acquired the learner is entitled to a qualification. The reality is that all qualifications registered by SAQA in line with its own regulations, whether they are based on unit standards or not, should be based on a coherent combination of exit level outcomes and related

assessment criteria which address the qualification purpose statement. If any qualification does not meet these criteria, this is a problem of implementation, not of policy. The Study Team report made it clear that the distinction between unit standards based qualifications and non unit standards based qualifications is largely an artificial one and that there should be room for both approaches.

[42] What is more critical is to distinguish the purpose of the qualification. To take two very different examples, some qualifications lead to recognition within an institutional learning pathway; others lead to recognition for occupational competence. The different purposes will require different forms of learning, different approaches to delivery and different forms of assessment at particular points in the learning process.

[43] It is important, therefore, in an integrated system for education, training and skills development to recognise the different forms of learning appropriately in qualifications.

[44] The implication of these differences for the NQF structures is that an integrated NQF requires, in addition to the band ETQAs, the establishment of a body to oversee the approaches to delivery and assessment for trades and occupational competence. The establishment of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) will facilitate a resolution to these problems. In order to execute this function effectively and efficiently, the QCTO will collaborate with other Quality Councils and other NQF organs. The establishment of the QCTO is not intended, nor will it impact on the integrity of the education and training system at education and training institutions.

[45] The jurisdiction of the QCTO will span all levels of the NQF. The QCTO and other Quality Councils will observe and adhere to principles underpinning the revised NQF framework in order to facilitate mobility and portability across the different learning paths.

Standards of occupational and professional competence

[46] The SAQA Act, 1995, is part of the array of legislation, under the Constitution, that is designed to redress past injustice in employment as well as in education, training and skills development. The NQF is expected to "facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within career paths" and "accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in employment opportunities". These NQF objectives are an essential element in achieving the goals of skills development and employment equity.

[47] A large number of occupational and professional bodies determine and assure the quality of standards of occupational and professional competence in collaboration with relevant education institutions. Such

standards take into account the ethical standards appropriate to the occupation and profession and the standards of occupational and professional practice required to protect the public's health, safety and well being. In high-risk areas, such as health, engineering and transport, occupational and professional standards are internationally benchmarked. Registration of members by occupational and professional bodies aims to ensure that new practitioners meet acceptable standards of competence and conduct before they practice independently. Members are required to exhibit such standards in practice and to engage in continuous professional development as a condition of maintaining their registration. Many occupational and professional bodies are also signatories to international conventions on occupational or professional standards and have incurred obligations on that account.

[48]   Throughout most of their history, South African occupations and professions (like many other social institutions including those in the education, training and skills development system) were controlled by and advanced the interests of one section of the population to the severe disadvantage of the majority of citizens. All occupational and professional practice is now subject to the democratic Constitution and since 1994 an increasing number of professions and occupations have been brought under statutory regulation, in terms of which occupational and professional bodies are established and are accountable to their respective governing bodies and Ministers. Most, if not all, of the new laws regulating occupations and professions recognise that the design and quality assurance of occupational and professional competence must take the NQF into account. Certain professional bodies have been accredited by SAQA as quality assurance agencies and any of these professional bodies already co-operate through voluntary agreements with the CHE and SETA ETQAs to ensure coherence within their professions.

[49]   There is a case to be made for the inclusion of non-statutory professions within the revised NQF architecture. The non-statutory professions have experienced difficulty in working within the current NQF system. It is envisaged that the establishment of a QCTO will facilitate a resolution of these problems.

[50]   Professional bodies will continue to operate under their current mandates, in relation to the licensing or registration of members and maintenance of professional and ethical standards. In terms of education, training and skills development they will cooperate where appropriate with relevant bodies in relation to standards setting, qualifications design and the quality assurance of education, training and skills development processes.

National skills development

[51]   Education, training and skills development are key elements of the Government's Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa

(ASGISA), whose interventions are designed to help halve unemployment and poverty by 2014. The shortage of skills has been identified as the single greatest impediment to the success of public infrastructure and private investment programmes. The Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) will help to accelerate processes to address priority skills. ASGISA's other interventions will focus on improving the quality of education, inter-departmental initiatives in adult basic education, training and skills development, and investment in both artisan and high-level skills production.

[52] The Government's commitment to national skills development is embodied in the second National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS 2005-2010, which is a comprehensive framework to develop skills for both employed and unemployed citizens through projects funded by Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the National Skills Fund (NSF). The new strategy broadens SETAs' support of learners to include learnerships, apprenticeships, internships, bursaries, workplace experiential learning and unit standards-based skills programmes. SETAs and projects funded by the National Skills Fund (NSF) will be bound by service level agreements to achieve their sectoral or project performance targets.

[53] ASGISA places emphasis on the urgent re-capitalisation, upgrading and re-direction of the Further Education and Training Colleges. This will require greater synergy between SETAs' training investments and the FET system. SETAs will need to play a more direct role in providing sector foresight studies and labour market analysis to enable the provision of skills to be responsive both in the immediate and long term.

[54] SETAs will also play an important role, working with the QCTO in the design and quality assurance of work based learning processes. They will thus continue to work with SAQA, occupational and professional bodies and other QCs to advance the mobility and progression of workers in learning and employment in accordance with the NQF objectives.

Comment [A2]: This was 2 separate paragraphs

The revised national qualifications framework

Principles of NQF implementation

[55] This policy for strengthening NQF implementation aims at making the NQF more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the country. In particular the NQF must assist citizens who were historically excluded from the national education, training and skills development system so that they have the opportunity to reach their potential. A model or architecture for NQF implementation is needed that will be simpler as well as coherent, participatory and accessible. The new model must be clear and unambiguous as to the roles of the government, the respective statutory bodies responsible for advice or implementation, and other participants in NQF processes.

[56] With these considerations in mind, the revised architecture will be based on the following principles:

- An integrated approach to education, training and skills development will be served through the incremental registration on the NQF of qualifications and competency standards acquired throughout the learning system, the recognition and appreciation of distinctions between different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education and training and expanding access, progression and mobility within and across all learning sectors.

- The current system of standards generation and quality assurance will be reviewed and streamlined within three structures called Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs).

- There will be ten NQF levels in order to allow proper scope for the full range of qualification types in the education, training and skills development system, especially in the post-matric, pre-higher education level, where much of the intermediate skills development is located. SAQA has taken note of the issue and gazetted draft level descriptors for a ten level NQF.

- Education and labour market interests, occupational and professional bodies, will be appropriately represented by experts and knowledgeable individuals on the bodies responsible for standards generation and quality assurance.

- The authority of government over all NQF statutory agencies will be affirmed. In particular the determination of NQF policy and regulations will be a Ministerial prerogative in terms of the relevant law.

- The Minister of Education and Labour will determine NQF qualifications criteria at all levels.

- Each NQF-registered qualification, whether incorporating unit standards or not, will be designed as a whole to serve a specified purpose.

- There needs to be recognition that various forms of learning are required in an integrated education, training and skills development system. The balance of the various forms of learning will be determined by the purpose of the qualification.

- Prior learning, properly assessed, will receive due recognition in terms of a comprehensive Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy.

- In order to enhance the recognition of learning achievements and the progress of learners in the system, a national credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system will accord credit value to registered unit standards and other components of qualifications for access purposes or towards the award of a qualification. Such a system will build on the present provisions for SAQA credits, but will be more responsive and more easily understood by different role players in the education, training and skills development system.

- Standards of occupational or professional competence required for registration by, or membership of, a recognised occupational or professional body are the business of that body in terms of its own rules, Act or international convention. However, such requirements are expected to advance NQF objectives. Ministers associated with occupational and professional bodies will be responsible for ensuring that this is the case, and for intervening where such bodies act in a manner that undermines the broad principles of the NQF. NQF structures will foster close collaboration with occupational and professional bodies in order to advance NQF objectives and achieve compatibility with NQF standards.

Authority of Government

[57]   SAQA will be accountable to the Minister of Education. The Minister of Education will develop national policy, legislation and appoint SAQA Board members after consultation with the Minister of Labour. The Quality Councils for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi) and Higher Education (CHE) will remain accountable to the Minster of Education. The new Quality Council for Occupations and Trades will be accountable to the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Education and Minister of Labour respectively will also provide SAQA and the QCs with a remit which sets out overall government strategy and priorities, including the priorities identified by JIPSA, and sufficient funding to support the delivery of the remit within an efficient and effective NQF implementation.

Inter-departmental collaboration

[58]   The Minister of Education, as convener, will direct the HRD Co-ordinating committee to:

- Oversee and provide support to the Ministers on HRD policy and strategy, and

   > **Comment [A3]:** This was only one bullet

- Promote the alignment of the NQF with the implementation of the government's HRD Strategy and the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA).

The revised NQF structures

Outline

[59]   The NQF will be implemented under the authority of the Ministers of Education and Labour. SAQA will continue to be the apex NQF organ, accountable to the Minister of Education, with a range of important functions listed below.

[60]   Executive authority for standards generation and the quality assurance of qualifications, provision and learning achievements will be undertaken by the three Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs).

[61]   The detailed work of standards generation and quality assurance of qualifications and providers will be performed by credible fit for purpose panels or committees of expert practice in the case of trades and occupations appointed by or under the authority of the QCs in terms of the NQF policy framework. Such fit for purpose panels and committees of expert practice will draw on the extensive work undertaken in past years under SAQA's aegis, and utilise the capacity of the relevant SETAs as well as statutory and non-statutory professional bodies in the respective areas.

[62]   The governing bodies of SAQA and the QCs, will each include competent and knowledgeable individuals from education, labour market and other sectors of the economy and society, commensurate with the importance of their tasks and responsibilities.

Establishment of a new structure

[63]   The QCs for General and Further Education and Training and Higher Education will be based on existing structures, namely Umalusi and the Council on Higher Education. A new institutional based will be established for the QC for Trades and Occupations. The QC for trades and occupations (QCTO) will be responsible for standards generation and quality assurance for all work based competency standards up to NQF Level 10. The QCTO will collaborate with the other two QCs in both qualification design and quality assurance to ensure progression and mobility for all learners.

[64]   The work of the QCTO will fall under the authority of the Minister of Labour. This structure will rationalise the work of sector ETQA bodies which currently fall under SETAs. The functions currently performed by CHE and its standing committee the HEQC and Umalusi will continue under the authority of the Minister of Education. QCs will still be able to delegate selected aspects of their work to role players currently in the education, training and skills development system.

[65]   In principle the single national qualifications framework should enable the respective bands to cohere and to articulate with each other and support career path progression. The guiding principle for the work of the QCs will be partnership and collaboration, while retaining the integrity and authority of individual players in the overall education, training and skills development system. The establishment of the third QC represents the most practical solution for implementation and management, and also addresses the need to reduce the number of ETQA bodies and rationalise their functions.

[66] In order to advance the development of a comprehensive Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policy frameworkthe Ministers will request SAQA, the CHE, Umalusi and the QCTO to initiate investigative work to evaluate the structure and content of the diverse range of qualifications currently offered within the education, training and skills development system, including the workplace. This work will inform the Ministers about the potential challenges and solutions necessary for the development of RPL and CAT policies

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

[67] SAQA has been governed by a stakeholder-representative board and managed by an executive leadership, which have together pioneered the development and implementation of the NQF in its formative years. The SAQA Act of 1995 has afforded SAQA considerable latitude, freedom of action and wide scope for initiative. Under SAQA's guidance the NQF has become a fixture and frame of reference for education, training and skills development in South Africa.

[68] The Ministers note that SAQA's Board and Executive have responded pro-actively to the impending policy changes by extending the number of NQF levels from eight to ten, strengthening SAQA's relationships with the Departments of Education and Labour, the Council on Higher Education and Umalusi, and converting the previous National Standards Bodies into consultative panels.

[69] Like its international counterparts, SAQA will continue to be the dedicated national oversight body for the development of the NQF with a particular responsibility for monitoring, analysis, research, advocacy and international liaison. SAQA will be the custodian of the values on which the NQF has been established and will report back to parliament on the effectiveness and impact of the NQF. From that perspective will provide considered advice to the government, through the Ministers of Education and Labour, on how well the objectives of the NQF are being served. It will also provide advice informed by international experience on improving NQF structures and practices. SAQA will also continue to represent South Africa in the international community of NQF agencies, and in particular work collegially with counterpart organisations in Africa through SADC and NEPAD.

[70] SAQA will:

- Evaluate the impact of the NQF and its structures in relation to the achievement of its objectives
- Report and be accountable to the Minister of Education.
- Advise on the impact of the NQF, further development and improvement of the NQF, and give on-going assistance to the QCs to resolve any emerging problems

- Execute the annual remit issued by the Minister of Education.
- Ensure that the articulation and progression mechanisms between the different qualification types (RPL, CAT and NCPF) meet the objectives of an integrated NQF
- Maintain and develop level descriptors for the NQF
- Advise the Ministers of Education and Labour on criteria for national standards and qualifications in consultation with the QCs
- Maintain and develop the register of national qualifications
- Set national criteria for the registration of various qualification types according to the policies of the Ministers of Education and Labour.
- Register unit standards and qualifications approved by the QCs if they meet national criteria
- Audit the QCs' compliance with the objectives of the NQF.
- Maintain and further develop the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) for the NQF
- Evaluate foreign qualifications for comparability with qualifications registered on the NQF
- Collaborate with local and international NQF implementing agencies on all matters of mutual interest and benchmark their work against leading practice locally and internationally
- Conduct or commission research and publish documents on matters related to the development and implementation of the NQF, and
- Promote the objectives of the NQF in all its work.

[71] The Minister of Education will appoint the SAQA Board after consultation with the Minister of Labour. The Board will number 16 persons, including the chairperson. The CEOs, or their designated representatives, of SAQA the QCs and a representative nominated by the Ministers of Education and Labour respectively will be members by virtue of their offices. The Minister of Education will call for nominations by stakeholders and the public for the remaining seats. The Board will include competent and knowledgeable individuals from education, labour market and other sectors of the economy and society, commensurate with the importance of their tasks and responsibilities. The members collectively should have the authority and credibility appropriate to a major national institution of this kind. The term of office of appointed members of the board will be five years. An appointed board member may serve no more than two consecutive terms.

Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs)

[72] Umalusi (the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council) will be designated the QC for General and Further Education and Training, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) will be designated the QC for Higher Education.

[73]   The new Quality Council for Occupations and Trades (QCTO) to be established by the Minister of Labour will deal with work based learning across all NQF levels. The QCTO will co-ordinate and streamline the ETQA functions of SETAs and the non-statutory professional bodies accredited as ETQAs and take over responsibility for identified shared services relating to trades, occupations and skills which cut across economic and social sectors.

[74]   The QCs will exercise their functions in terms of policy determined by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labour. They will advise the Ministers of Education or Labour respectively and be responsible for standards generation and quality assurance of qualification development, and where appropriate provision and certification of learning achievements, operating within their respective scopes. The QCs will be responsible for a new model of standards generation that will replace the previous model in which voluntary National Standards Bodies (NSBs), as an organic part of SAQA, co-ordinated the work of SGBs.

[75]   In order to execute their responsibilities for the design, development and quality assurance of national qualifications and unit standards, as well as quality promotion, the QCs will establish fit for purpose panels or committees of expert practice. These bodies will comprise knowledgeable persons, specialists and practitioners, as appropriate, whose judgment and expertise is respected by their peers from education, labour market and other sectors of the economy and society, commensurate with the importance of their tasks and responsibilities.

[76]   The functions of a QC will include but not be limited to:

- Advise the Minister of Education and Labour respectively on their areas of jurisdiction
- Maintain collegial relations with SAQA, the other QCs, the NSA, SETAs, recognised occupational or professional bodies and other NQF organs
- Undertake responsibility for qualifications design and standards generation by fit for purpose bodies within its scope while guarding against unnecessary overlap and duplication
- Define the structure and nature of national qualifications and recommend the criteria for national qualifications, unit standards [and modules] to the respective Ministers for approval as policy
- Submit to SAQA qualifications, unit standards or modules that meet the relevant national criteria for registration on the NQF
- Undertake responsibility for the quality assurance of qualifications, learning achievements, providers or workplace learning sites and quality promotion within its scope

- Benchmark their work against leading practice locally and internationally in collaboration with other NQF organs implementing agencies
- Track, monitor and report on the effectiveness and impact of learning interventions
- Promote communities of trust in qualifications design and quality assurance within its scope, and
- Promote the objectives of the NQF in all its work.

[77] The QCs will have the authority to delegate selected functions of (but not the responsibility for) standards generation and quality assurance to appropriate organisations, including non-statutory professional bodies and SETAs.

[78] The current functions of Umalusi and the CHE will continue under the new arrangement and their new or modified responsibilities for standards generation, quality assurance or quality promotion within their bands will be added.

[79] The Minister of education will appoint the members of the Boards or Councils of CHE and Umalusi. The Minister of Labour will appoint the members of the Board of the QCTO. Each council will number 16 persons (including the chairperson). The CEOs (or their designated representatives) of SAQA, the NSA and the QCs and representatives nominated by the Ministers of Education and Labour respectively will be members of each council. The Ministers of Education and of Labour will call for nominations by stakeholders and the public for the remaining seats on the QCs falling within each Minister's ambit. The councils will include competent and knowledgeable individuals from education, labour market and other sectors of the economy and society, commensurate with the importance of their tasks and responsibilities. The members collectively should have the authority and credibility appropriate to a major national institution of this kind. The term of office of appointed council members will be five years. An appointed council member (other than a member appointed ex officio) may serve no more than two consecutive terms.

Transitional arrangements

[80] This policy will be implemented with due regard for the complexity of the education, training and skills development system, the needs of the labour market and the need to maintain stability within the system. The interests of employees of affected statutory agencies such as SAQA are important considerations. The Ministers of Education and of Labour will determine appropriate transitional arrangements once detailed consultations with SAQA, the CHE, Umalusi, the NSA, SETAs, occupational and non-statutory professional bodies, all other interested bodies and the National Treasury have been undertaken.

[81]   The amended SAQA Act and associated regulations will form the central legislation for the implementation of the revised NQF policy..

[82]   Other legislative measures required by this policy will be prepared and introduced in Parliament.