

## South Africa

South Africa has in recent years achieved a high level of macro-economic and political stability. At the same time, the legacy of Apartheid remains a significant challenge in South Africa even today, with various formal and informal initiatives underway to improve the level of education of historically disadvantaged people. Society in South Africa is profoundly unequal. While this has historical causes, the current economic environment has not been able to eliminate large social inequality gap. Thus, though levels of inequality remain high (Gini coefficient = 0.35), they are no longer solely based on racial divisions. High levels of unemployment exist, particularly in the under-30 age group, and unemployment is higher among women than men (Samuels, 2013).

A key challenge at the moment is quality provision in the entire schooling sector, with only pockets of high quality provision. International comparative studies rate this sector as needing strengthening, more so in maths and science subjects. Several initiatives to address this problem are underway, including annual national assessments through which problem areas are identified, tracked and also addressed. Despite these efforts, the legacy of Apartheid is starkly evident in the schooling sector and much more will have to be done.

Approximately 4 per cent of the South African population are citizens of other countries, mostly from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Qualifications obtained outside South Africa are evaluated by SAQA, with the majority of applications falling into the highly skilled grouping. Most of these highly skilled migrants originate from SADC countries, for example the majority (26.9 per cent) come from Zimbabwe.

South Africa has a large rural population. 41 per cent live in rural areas where the levels of poverty and unemployment are high. At the same time, South Africa is experiencing rapid urban migration, especially among men in the 20–34 age groups. Most urban areas are surrounded by a periphery of shack settlements with little access to basic services. A high proportion of households in rural areas are headed by young women. (Statistics South Africa, 2002).

Between 1995 and 2004 the total number of qualifications awarded in South Africa increased, with an average annual growth rate of 4.3 per cent (SAQA 2007). The highest growth was seen in undergraduate degree levels. The growth in the number of qualifications awarded from 1995 to 2004 has been accompanied by a drastic increase in university enrolments - there is just less than 1 million learners in the university system - which constitutes a significant challenge in the country (*Ibid.*) From 2002 until 2011 over 281,843 work-related qualifications and 1, 6 million work-related part-qualifications were obtained, which shows steady improvement in the culture of learning in the workplace.

The vocational sector, comprising 50 further education and training (FET) colleges, has grown significantly over the last 5 years from about 360 000 enrolments to over 800,000 in 2014. Despite

significant government investment, there are still problems as FET colleges are often viewed as a second or third choice option for those with less ability. In an attempt to strengthen this sector, some FET colleges are being transformed into community colleges, and other are being repositioned as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. While enrolment rates have improved in recent years as stated above, much still needs to be done to convince the broader public that the vocational route can also be a first choice for the majority of students.

## **1. CHALLENGES THAT THE NQF ADDRESSES**

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been established in 1998 following the promulgation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act in 1995. The NQF has been designed as an integrated system with a strong transformational agenda to promote lifelong learning for all South Africans in a non-racial, non-sexist and democracy. Preceding the SAQA Act, a broad and extensive consultation process took place that had, as one of its roots, in the late 1980s, the labour movement's desire to recognise the tradable skills of black workers in the bargaining forums for better conditions of service. The overarching purpose of the NQF is to facilitate articulation, recognition, access, and redress across education, training, development and workplace learning for all South Africans. The NQF is the principal instrument through which national education and training qualifications are recognised and quality assured in South Africa.

The NQF Act was promulgated in 2008 and came into effect from 1 June 2009, replacing the SAQA Act of 1995. Some of the main reasons for the review and subsequent change to the NQF environment have been debates over the integration of education and training, the different needs of the sectors in education and training, stakeholder versus experts, and power-relations between bodies within the NQF structure. The most important change was the establishment of three sub-frameworks as part of the comprehensive NQF: the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework. Within the new NQF landscape, professional bodies apply to SAQA to be recognised within the education and training system, while professional designations are also included through an agreed process between SAQA and professional bodies (SAQA, 2012b).

At present the main focus is on streamlining and simplifying the implementation of the NQF, and making it more responsive to South Africa's needs. SAQA and its quality partners, the three Quality Councils (the Council on Higher Education, Umalusi, and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations) are working together to achieve the objectives of the NQF.

## **2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives of the NQF as outlined in the NQF Act No 67 of 2008 are the same as the objectives of the South African NQF when the SAQA Act was promulgated in 1995. These are, to:

- create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements,
- facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths,
- enhance the quality of education and training, and
- accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities

The objectives of the NQF are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. SAQA and the Quality Councils must:

- develop, foster and maintain an integrated transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements, and
- ensure South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality and is internationally comparable

### 3. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND THE USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

One of the main changes to the South African NQF was an expansion of the levels from eight to ten. Where the eight-level NQF required Master's degrees and Doctorates to be grouped together on Level 8, the 10-level NQF now rectifies this situation.

**Table 1. South African NQF including the three sub-frameworks (Higher Education, General and Further Education and Training, and Occupational)**

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK		
LEVEL	SUB-FRAMEWORK AND QUALIFICATION TYPES	
10	DOCTORAL DEGREE DOCTORAL DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	*
9	MASTER'S DEGREE MASTER'S DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL)	*
8	BACHELOR HONOURS DEGREE POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA BACHELOR'S DEGREE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 8)
7	BACHELOR'S DEGREE ADVANCED DIPLOMA	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 7)
6	DIPLOMA ADVANCED CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 6)
5	HIGHER CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 5)
4	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 4)
3	INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 3)
2	ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 2)
1	GENERAL CERTIFICATE	OCCUPATIONAL CERTIFICATE (LEVEL 1)

Note: Qualification types beyond level 8 on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) will be developed when needed.

Learning outcomes are widely used across all sectors in South Africa. Learning outcomes also form the basis of the NQF and the qualifications registered on the framework. SAQA is currently in the

process of strengthening its approach to the evaluation of foreign qualifications to be learning outcomes-orientated.

Considerable progress has been made with the implementation of the revised NQF since 2009. Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the registration of qualifications and part-qualifications, the recognition of professional bodies, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and assessment have been completed. The level descriptors have also been agreed between SAQA and the Quality Councils. In order to strengthen collaboration amongst the key agencies, SAQA has overseen the development of a System of Collaboration and an NQF Implementation Framework which is the roadmap for NQF implementation. A national career advice service project and policy have been developed to assist users to navigate the education and training system. Credential evaluation also remains closely integrated with the NQF. The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), which is the national repository for information on learner achievements and related matters, continues to provide important insights into the status of the education and training system in South Africa.

#### **4. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS**

In addition to changes in the NQF legislation, the government also reformed the political and administrative structures of the education and training landscape in order to prove the quality of education and training. The previously single Department of Education was divided into two: a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and a Department of Basic Education (DBE). The training component was transferred from the Department of Labour to the DHET. This means that the DHET is responsible for universities, universities of technology, further education and training colleges (being renamed as community colleges and TVET colleges), adult basic education and the entire training sector. Individual training colleges (e.g. nursing, agricultural, etc.) are still functioning under different departments. The DBE is responsible for the formal schooling sector from primary to secondary school, as well as for the national adult literacy campaign, known as Kha Ri Gude.

The NQF continues to be led by a central statutory body, SAQA with extensive input by other stakeholders. Three sector-specific bodies have taken over the responsibility of quality assurance and standards development within their respective sectors, while SAQA registers all qualifications. The sector bodies are referred to as Quality Councils. The three Quality Councils are responsible for the sub-frameworks of higher education, further and general education and training, and trades and occupations. Each Quality Council is responsible for determining their qualification types in accordance with the overall criteria determined by SAQA. SAQA is responsible for the overall development and implementation of the NQF and the coordination of the three Quality Councils. The three Quality Councils and SAQA report to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, while Umalusi (one of the Quality Councils) on certain aspects reports to the Minister of Basic Education.

Representatives from trade unions, provider bodies (including higher education, further education, general education) professional bodies, employers, and experts serve on the boards and councils of SAQA and the Quality Councils.

Within the NQF landscape, professional bodies have also been given the opportunity to take on specific responsibilities related to qualifications development and quality assurance provided they meet the policy and criteria set by SAQA. By July 2014, 69 professional bodies had already met these requirements with over 251 professional designations registered.

## **5. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING**

In South Africa the term RPL is used for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and is defined as comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification. Learning is measured in terms of specific learning outcomes for a specific qualification and may lead to achievement of credits towards the qualification. Two types of RPL have emerged in South Africa: RPL for credit usually associated with general and further education and training, and RPL for access, usually associated with higher education.

In the 18 years since the creation of the NQF, RPL has become a reality for over 500,000 people who have either gone through or are currently engaged in an RPL process. From "islands of excellent practice", the country continues to move towards a national RPL system. There are three main target groups for RPL: The access group: under-qualified adult learners wishing to up-skill and improve their qualifications, and candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme; The redress group: workers who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed, who may have worked for many years but were prevented from gaining qualifications due to restrictive past policies; Candidates who leave formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short programmes.

The greatest number of RPL candidates fall between NQF levels 2 and 4, and do not, in the main, possess a school-leaving certificate (Samuels, 2013).

## **6. REFERENCING TO REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS**

South Africa, as a member state of the South African Development Community (SADC), has played an active role in the development of a regional qualifications framework for SADC since 2001 (SADC, 2005). Progress has, however, been slow and impeded mainly as a result of the diversity of the educational training systems, the varying levels of development between countries and the lack of a strong central driving agency.

## **7. LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE PLANS**

The South African NQF has become an integral feature of the education and training landscape in South Africa. Learning outcomes are widely used across all sectors. SAQA and the three Quality Councils have become mature organisations with clearly defined mandates that work together to implement the NQF.

Articulation between the sub-frameworks of the NQF remains an area that needs to be improved in the future. A national policy and a set of articulation criteria are currently being considered to address some of these challenges.

The intention is to expand RPL through a national co-ordinated strategy. To ensure that this RPL strategy has a major impact, the Minister of Higher Education and Training has tasked a national RPL task team to develop a national RPL strategy. The task team completed its work in 2013 and a final decision about the way forward will be announced very soon.

New legislation for the post-school sector is currently being developed. A White Paper on the Post Education and Training system has been released to the public and implementation plans are currently being developed.

SAQA is currently shifting its focus from policy development, which has been required by the NQF Act of 2008 and has been largely completed by 2014, towards overseeing policy implementation. This will include greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, as well as an increased role for SAQA in cases where unfair and discriminatory exclusionary practices occur preventing the mobility of learners.

International benchmarking between the South African NQF and other countries will also be considered. Such a process has already been initiated with Malaysia and will be completed in 2014.

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