SAQA – your partner in lifelong learning

“My NQF-registered qualification gives me the confidence to pursue a career in hospitality in South Africa and abroad.”

Samantha Lawrence
Diploma in Hospitality Management

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Insights from the South African National Qualifications Framework

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SAQA oversees the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. SAQA ensures that South Africa has:

1. A standards setting system
2. A quality assurance system
3. A comprehensive information system that supports the NQF
4. Including:
   - Research
   - Communication and advocacy
   - Evaluation of foreign qualifications
   - International collaboration
Part 1: The South African context

- Middle-income country (USD 3,600 per capita income)
- Large proportion of young people (51% below 25 and largely black)
- Life expectancy in 2007 was 50 years
- 45% live below national poverty line (ZAR 354 per month)
- Unemployment rate between 25% and 40%
Part 2: The indigenisation of competency based training

- The South African Qualifications Authority Act (1995) established the NQF shaped by a confluence of external and internal dynamics:
  - Increased emphasis on a skilled flexible labour force
  - Expectations of greater integration of education and training
  - Prioritisation of a move away from the apartheid legislation
  - Use of an outcomes-based approach influenced by CBT
- In 2001 a review process was set in motion, concluded in 2007, with the issue of a Joint Policy Statement
- Key contestations have been:
  - The role of the NQF and SAQA in transformation
  - Different forms of learning and the relations between them
- Concerns that CBT could be too ‘behaviourist’ and ‘atomistic’ led to a move to ‘outcomes based education’ – marking a shift to more constructivist theory (Piaget, Vygotsky)
Part 2 continued: The indigenisation of competency based training

- The SAQA structure is configured around three strategic areas:
  - Quality assurance
  - Standards setting
  - National Learners’ Records Database

- A lack of systemic coherence in the occupational sector has been problematic

- A new NQF Act is to be promulgated early in 2009
  - A move away from standardisation to differentiation
  - Away from an up-front design-down and prescriptive approach
  - Shift from 8 to 10 levels
  - Establishment of three quality councils
  - Occupational qualifications with distinct knowledge & theory, practical skills, and work experience components
Part 3: Debates that have informed the development of the South African NQF

- Early ambitious views of the NQF have been replaced by more modest views of NQFs as frameworks of communication that grow incrementally.
- A distinction between a framework that describes what exists (developed countries) and a framework that prescribes what ought to be (developing countries).
- A distinction between ‘competency standards’ (linked to job descriptions) and ‘academic standards’ (that relate to domains of knowledge).
- Shift to a research-driven policy which informs the political and organisational shape of the NQF.
Part 4: The South African NQF as a linked framework

NQF Act (2009)

SD Act Amendment

HE Act Amendment

GENFET Act Amendment

Occupational Qualifications Framework (draft)

Higher Education Qualifications Framework

GENFET Qualifications Framework (draft)
Part 5: The post-NQF review landscape

Minister of Education

Department of Education

Council on Higher Education (CHE)

General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (Umalusi)

Minister of Labour

Department of Labour

Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

National Skills Authority

Statutory and non-statutory professional bodies

SAQA

Sector Education and Training Authorities

Communities of Expert Practice

Providers

Learners
Part 6: Achievements of the South Africa NQF

- The objectives of the NQF (integration, access, mobility, progression, quality, redress & development) remain uncontested since 1995

- In terms of recent quantitative data:
  - 74 Standards Generating Bodies exist
  - 787 new qualifications registered
  - 7,092 provider generated qualifications recorded (492 new, 6,600 historical)
  - 7.5 million achievements registered on the NLRD
  - 23,990 providers accredited for 6,683 qualifications
  - 31 accredited education and training quality assurance bodies

- Over 35 Joint implementation Plans entered into with various stakeholder bodies

- Greater awareness of quality assurance issues in higher education
Part 7: National Learner’s Records Database

- The NLRD is more than a database – it is an integrated electronic management information system.

- Main functions of the NLRD:
  - Macro: provide policy makers with comprehensive information
  - Micro: tracks the paths of individual learners and providing employers with information

- Through the NLRD SAQA is in a position to perform various analyses, such as the recent trends in higher education report.

- Data on uptake of qualifications is being mined.

- Searchable databases is available and web-based.

- The NLRD forms an important pillar of a proposed national human resource database that will track key market issues.

- A key challenge has been in facilitating the relationship between people and the data that they manage.
Part 8: International experience

• Early partnerships focused primarily on funding
  • SAQA & the EU: for the development and implementation of the NQF
  • SAQA & CIDA: development of the NLRD

• More recent mutually beneficial partnerships have included:
  • Commonwealth Secretariat (teacher qualifications)
  • Commonwealth of Learning (transnational qualifications framework)
  • SADC (regional qualifications framework and benchmarking)
  • Support to specific countries such as Seychelles, Angola and Ethiopia (on request)

• Closer ties with CARICOM and the OECD have been built

• Today SAQA is an active partner and contributor in NQF related developments continentally and internationally
Part 9: The Southern African regional experience

- Incremental process that started in 1997 within the framework of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training
- Largely isolated from regional developments in Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean
- SADCQF Concept Document developed (2005)
- Benchmarking of quality assurance systems undertaken (2007)
- Comparative analysis of qualifications in the region underway (2009)
- Key contestations:
  - Diverse status of in-country progress
  - Form and function of the governing agency
  - Lack of intellectual engagement
Part 10: Insights from the South African experience

- The importance of coherent and systemic implementation and the slow nature of educational transformation
- Qualifications frameworks can contribute to transformation provided they are seen as a platform for communication and coordination
- Not enough has been done to develop navigational tools
- Guidance and counselling across the system requires attention
- A strong experimental scientific approach is needed
- The strong move to privilege OBE as a template for the whole system did not succeed, mainly due to:
  - An underestimation of the weaknesses of institutions and the lack of competent educators inherited from apartheid
  - Conceptual confusions and contestations over competences and outcomes
  - Lack of clarity of the purposes of the NQF
NQFs are best understood as works-in-progress and contestable artefacts of modern society which can contribute in a modest way to how a society manages the relations between education, training and work by finding ‘common ground’ between distinct forms of learning and their articulation with work place practices.

SAQA understands the South African NQF as a framework of communication, coordination and collaboration across education, training and work.