I needed to dig deep in order to grow.
Farm owner Mzwandile Makeba at age 7, 1980
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Workshop Guide

Towards effective development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks

National Qualifications Frameworks

Workshop Guide: Towards effective development and implementation of national qualifications frameworks

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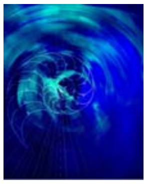
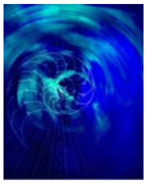


TABLE OF CONTENTS



INTRODUCTION

Aim of this guide

Since the early 1990s, various governments across the world have embarked on ambitious and far-reaching attempts to reform their education and training systems. In many such cases, national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) have been used as key levers to facilitate the transformation processes. As more countries consider the same route it has become critical that government leaders, policy makers and key national stakeholders understand NQFs, and, more importantly, become aware of the strengths and weaknesses that they are associated with.

Over the past few years I have been involved with the development and implementation of the South African NQF as well as the proposed SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). In working with various NQF partners and stakeholders I became increasingly aware that our interpretations of the various components that make up NQFs differed greatly – to the extent that we may agree on a particular aspects (e.g. the integration of education and training) even though we have radically different interpretations thereof. As a result I have made a first attempt to capture some of the thinking on NQFs in this guide. I do not claim that this guide covers *all* aspects associated with NQFs – I rather present it as a working document that can be improved with your input. Any errors are my own.

This guide provides an overview of the various components that constitute an NQF in order to assist individuals responsible for NQF implementation to develop and implement an NQF that is most suitable to their specific country.

Structure and outline of the guide

Literature shows that NQFs have a range of diverse features, these include:

- a grid of levels and structures, also described as a map of qualifications
- national standards and qualifications
- scope, i.e. the types (e.g. vocational and educational) and levels (schooling and higher education) of qualifications
- overt or covert purpose
- regulatory dimension
- comparability, harmonisation and benchmarking
- range of design features (e.g. quality assurance)
- organisation of bureaucracy

NQF literature contains a variety of references to such components, aspects and characteristics of qualifications frameworks, yet limited progress has been made towards a consolidated internationally accepted classification of NQFs:

> The organisation of qualifications is one of the most basic features of any system of education and training. However until recently it has been little debated or researched. It may be that it is for this reason that those proposing the introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks rarely recognise the radical implications of the changes involved (Young, 2005:8).

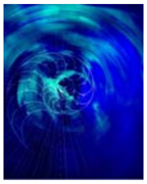
The organisation of qualifications is one of the most basic features of any system of education and training

The guide is based on an emerging typology of national qualifications frameworks that is based on international debates on the usefulness and implementation of such frameworks. The content of each study unit reflects eight categories of the NQF typology:

- **Study Unit 1 (Defining the NQF)** is a discussion on the different understandings of NQFs.
- **Study Unit 2(Guiding philosophy)** is a reflection on the dominant underlying thinking that NQFs embrace.
- **Study Unit 3 (Purpose)** is a discussion of the explicit purposes of NQFs, often in tension with the more implicit/covert purposes originating from the guiding philosophies of each.
- **Study Unit 4 (Scope)** explains the categories, levels and types of qualifications that can be included on NQFs.
- **Study Unit 5 (Prescriptiveness)** includes reference to micro level perceptiveness as well as more systemic level requirements that include the level of compliance associated with quality assurance and standards setting processes.
- **Study Unit 6 (Incrementalism)** discuses the rate (progress over a specific period) and manner (phased or comprehensive) of implementation of NQFs.
- **Study Unit 7 (Policy breadth)** explains the extent to which an NQF is directly and explicitly linked with other measures that influence how the framework is used.
- **Study Unit 8 (Architecture)** describes the structural arrangements that make up the various components of an NQF, e.g. how qualifications are defined and registered, learning outcomes, credits and assessment procedures.
- **Study Unit 9 (Governance)** covers aspects such as legislation, the roles and functions of agencies, partners and stakeholders, and funding.
- **Study Unit 10 (Developing and implementing an NQF)** is your responsibility. The unit is only semi-structured and left incomplete to allow you the opportunity to develop it within the context of your own country.

Acknowledgements

I would like to recognise the work of various colleagues, mentors and experts from South Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, England, Scotland and Ireland.



STUDY UNIT 1: DEFINING AN NQF

1.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by a social construct
- list and explain the key typological components of NQFs
- describe at least two existing NQFs by using the typology
- formulate your own definition of an NQF

1.2 Introduction

An increasing number and variety of NQFs have emerged across the world in recent years. According to Mavimbela (2001:2) the NQF is a concept ‘that only seems to have become common currency in organisational design in the last quarter of the 20th century’.

Originating mostly from developments in the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s, NQFs have come to represent current thinking about competency, recognition for learning and national and regional portability. All in all the concept of a NQF is not as clear-cut as some might argue. Ranging from “loose” arrangements that simply reflect already established national systems, to “tight” arrangements that are highly prescriptive (Tuck, Hart and Keevy, 2004) NQFs have come to represent national attempts by governments to make changes to their education and training systems. Simply put, NQFs are not only about qualifications, or qualification structures, NQFs are complex social constructs with context-specific characteristics, purposes and features.

NQFs are complex social constructs with context-specific characteristics, purposes and features

In many of the first NQFs, if not all, development and implementation was associated with significant contestations that lead to extended periods of review and adjustments. Second generation NQFs (implemented in the late 1990s, early 2000s) on the other hand, show less signs of contestation, while most recent developments, or third generation NQFs, show even less. Examples are:

- 1st generation NQFs - England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and Ireland;
- 2nd generation NQFs: Mexico, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, Philippines, Namibia, Mauritius and Malaysia; and
- 3rd generation NQFs: France, SADC (regional), EU (regional), Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Botswana, Malawi, Philippines, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, Barbados, Colombia and the Caribbean (regional).

In order to clarify the NQF concept the following key aspects are discussed in this study unit:

- NQFs in general – showing that NQFs are made up of a range of diverse features;
- NQFs as social constructs – a means by which the aims and values of stakeholders are brought together in a single public system;
- Suggested NQF typology – eight categories or features of NQFs are identified;
- Examples of NQFs - the South African NQF and the proposed SADC Qualifications Framework are briefly discussed.

1.3 NQFs in general

A framework is defined as a structure or frame supporting or containing something. Mavimbela (2001) suggests two ways of interpreting such a framework: the first views a framework as a durable structure, meeting different needs at different times - she also warns that this structure could be 'too narrow and complex for ordinary human beings to use, and so becomes a prison'; the second view is similar, but differs in that it focuses on growth, "with the right open spaces so that it does not limit".

Cosser (2001:160) adds a similar interpretation:

> A national qualifications framework is, in the first instance, a *framework*. It is, to use the construction metaphor, not the building itself but the frame, the constructional system, that gives shape and strength to the building…

Both Mavimbela and Cosser highlight the fact that in essence an NQF is about the levels and structures, albeit non-physical, that forms the grid upon which qualifications are pinned. It is however doubtful if the eight or ten levels of the South African NQF, together with the associated level descriptors, number of credits and notional hours collectively constitute an NQF. A definition from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA, 2002) goes some way towards expanding the definition although still limited mainly to the design:

> …a qualifications framework, be it the NQF or any other, provides nationally recognized, consistent standards and qualifications and recognition for all learning of knowledge and skills.

The definition of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) suggests that an element of scope or comprehensiveness may also be included:

> …unified system of thirteen national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training…and the higher education sector (mainly universities) (www.aqf.edu, accessed 15 February 2005).

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications and Framework (SCQF) also includes the notions of scope and design, but adds the notion of an underlying, covert or overt purpose:

> From 2001, mainstream Scottish qualifications have been brought into a single unifying framework known as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications and Framework (SCQF). In this Framework, qualifications are described in terms of their levels and their credit value…These qualifications provide the foundations of a learning and credit transfer framework that is being implemented and embedded throughout Scotland's education and training provision (SQA, 2003:1).

The Irish NQF also adds a more bureaucratic and even regulatory dimension:

> …a [Irish National Qualifications] framework for the development, recognition and award of qualifications in the State…based on standards of knowledge, skills or competence to be acquired by learners (Ireland, 1999: Section 7).

An example of a much more recent development, the proposed SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) adds other dimensions of comparability, harmonisation and benchmarking:

> …consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region, to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications by [SADC] Member States, to harmonise qualifications wherever possible, and to create regional standards where appropriate (SADC TCCA, 2005:7).

Another third generation NQF, the proposed Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) highlights some of the earlier points, namely the structuring of new and existing qualifications, but adds specific design features related to quality assurance and the recognition of all forms of learning:

> A NQF is a structure of defined and nationally accredited qualifications, which are awarded at defined levels. It indicates the interrelationships of the qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another. NQF, therefore, is the route through which the country brings education and training together in a single Unified System. A qualifications framework is designed to provide: (a) Quality assured, nationally recognised and consistent training standards; (b) Recognition and credit for all acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications (Lesotho MSTF, 2004: 7).

Taking NQF definitions from other countries such as Mexico (Zuniga, 2003), Namibia (Gertze, 2003) and Zimbabwe (Pesenai, 2003) adds even more dimensions to the concept of an NQF.

The point to be made is that NQFs cannot be seen as only the 'constructional system' Cosser speaks of; they are in fact complex (social) constructs that go beyond this "framework" interpretation – a point also made explicitly by Cosser and others (see the following section).

ACTIVITY 1.1

(1) Try to list at list at least at least eight features of an NQF.

(2) Which of these do you think need to be considered in your country?

1.4 NQFs as social constructs

The notion of an NQF as being a socially determined and dynamic object is widely supported. Cosser (2001: 157) explains the importance of consensus:

> …by "social construct" SAQA means in the first instance a mental construction (of a framework) that is socially determined – shaped by consensus of those individuals and groups party to its construction.

Isaacs (2001:124) on the other hand suggests that a social construct necessary implies that some form of resistance and contestation can be expected:

> The essential nature of the NQF is that of a social construct, in that we as social actors in society not only theorise about, construct and implement it, but we also enable, actively change or work against it.

Isaacs also lists three necessary criteria for a successful social construct:

- **democratic participation of stakeholders** – he comments that the legitimacy of the social construct is undermined if this does not occur;
- **intellectual scrutiny** – credibility is influenced if this does not happen, includes 'academic scrutiny, international benchmarking, best practice, cutting-edge research and development and appropriate international comparators'; and
- **adequate resourcing** – Isaacs makes the comment that failure to consider affordability and resourcing has led to the demise of most social constructs.

Cosser (in Cosser *et al*, 1999:1) agrees with Isaacs's understanding:

> …the NQF is a social construct, a synthesis of the experience, thinking and practice of South Africans from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds representing a variety of world-views. The cornerstones of this construct are democratic participation,

> intellectual scrutiny, and the availability of resources – notions central to SAQA's development and implementation of the NQF.

Tuck *et al* (2004:12), although agreeing with the notion of an NQF as a social construct, warn that the links with the stakeholders (society) can be lost during the sometimes difficult and complex implementation phase:

> The central point is that each NQF is a *social construct* – a means by which the aims and values of stakeholders – politicians, practitioners, learners, and social partners – are brought together in a single, very public, system. The system features of any country's NQF should be designed to be appropriate to its agreed aims and purposes. These in turn should reflect the values and aspirations of stakeholders. Not surprisingly, given the complexity of the change processes involved in designing and implementing an NQF, system development can seem to acquire 'a life of its own' and the links with stakeholder-derived aims and purposes weakened (Tuck *et al*, 2004:12, emphasis in the original).

NQF development can seem to acquire 'a life of its own' and the links with stakeholder-derived aims and purposes weakened

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ACTIVITY 1.2

(1) Use Isaacs's criteria to discuss how can you can make sure that stakeholders are included in the development of your NQF?

(2) What else do you think needs to be considered to ensure effective NQF development and implementation?

1.5 Towards an NQF typology

NQFs can be defined using a typology based mainly on the work of Tuck *et al* (2004) and includes components as suggested by Young (2005), Raffe (1994) and Granville (2004). The components are briefly discussed below.

Guiding philosophy

As is the case with most education and training developments, current thinking can usually be traced back to a particular school of thought. NQF development is no exception, although it is peculiar in that scholars associate NQFs with a wide variety of guiding philosophies ranging from post-Fordism to reductionism. Even within specific countries the opinions are diverse, suggesting the need for a careful analysis of each to fully understand the specific NQF.

Purpose

Some NQFs purpose to achieve social justice (e.g. South Africa), others to improve access and comparability (e.g. the proposed SADCQF), and other to regulate education and training systems (here South Africa is also a good example).

Scope

The varieties of qualifications that are registered on NQFs vary from country to country. In some cases the NQF encompasses all forms and levels of training, while in many others specific sectors, most notably Higher Education, are excluded. The scope of an NQF refers to the extent to which the various systems and sectors are unified.

Prescriptiveness

Prescriptivess refers to the stringency of the criteria that qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included on the NQF. As noted by Tuck *et al* (2004:5), prescriptiveness ‘has been the single most contentious aspect of the implementation of first generation NQFs’.

Incrementalism

The rate (tempo or period of implementation) and manner (starting with specific sectors, or doing all at once) of NQF implementation differs from country to country. South Africa stands out as one of the most radical and quickest implementations, while a country such as Ireland has opted for a more gradual approach.

Policy breadth

The extent to which the establishment of NQFs are linked to other related measures. These include design features (also referred to as intrinsic logic) and institutional arrangements, such as credit transfer and employment criteria (referred to as institutional logic).

Architecture

Design features of NQFs refer to the organisational and structural features that characterise a particular NQF. Examples include the use of outcomes-based qualifications, cores skills and level descriptors.

Governance

NQF governance includes all the activities that are purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control and manage NQF development and implementation. Examples include legislation, the roles of implementing agencies and funding.

1.6 The South African NQF

The five objectives of the South African NQF provide a useful overview, namely to:

1. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2. facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;

3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (SA, 1995b).

SAQA (2001a:1) defines the NQF as:

> …a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievements are registered to enable recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, and thereby using an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning.

The principles of the NQF include *integration* (to form part of a system of human resource development which provides for the establishment of a unifying approach to education and training); *relevance* (to be and remain responsive to national development needs); *credibility* (to have national and international value and acceptance); *coherence* (to work within a consistent framework of principles and certification); *flexibility* (to allow for multiple pathways to the same learning ends); *standards* (to be expressed in terms of nationally agreed framework and internationally accepted outcomes); *legitimacy* (to provide for the participation of all national stakeholders in the planning and co-ordination of standards and qualifications); *access* (to provide ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression); *articulation* (to provide for learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system); *progression* (to ensure that the framework of qualifications permits individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications via different appropriate combinations of the components of the delivery system); *portability* (to enable learners to transfer their credits of qualifications from one learning institution and/or employer to another); *recognition of prior learning* (to, through assessment, give credit to learning which has already been acquired in different ways e.g. through life experience); and *guidance of learners* (to provide for the counselling of learners by specially trained individuals who meet nationally recognised standards for educators and trainers) (SAQA, 2000:5-6).

Design features of the South African NQF include an eight-level framework (currently being amended to ten levels), three bands, a range of qualification types and credits (where one credit is based on ten notional hours of work). The structure of the NQF is illustrated in the diagram below.

NQF level	Band
8 **7** **6** **5**	**Higher Education and Training (HET)**
4 **3** **2**	**Further Education and Training (FET)**
1	**General Education and Training (GET)**

The South African NQF is premised on legislation

The South African NQF is premised on legislation. The SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) lead to the establishment of SAQA as overseeing body – the Act also described the composition, role and functions of SAQA. Also included in the Act was the establishment of quality assurance and standards setting bodies, the ETQAs, NSBs and SGBs. More importantly though, the SAQA Act lead to the formal establishment of the South African NQF – ironically the naming of the Act, as the *SAQA* Act, and not the *NQF* Act, was one of the first signs (some would even argue mistakes) of the contestations that were to be associated with NQF implementation in the years to come. Even by 2005, NQF stakeholders and partners were still fully supportive of the objectives and principles if the NQF (SAQA, 2004), although support for the implementing agencies were much less consolidated (DoE and DoL, 2002 and 2003). SAQA itself has also recently reflected on its branding strategy, considering a change in focus from advocacy of SAQA as overseeing body, to the advocacy of the NQF.

Two Regulations followed from the SAQA Act: the NSB Regulations (SA, 1998b) and the ETQA Regulations (SA, 1998a):

The NSB Regulations prescribe the structure of the standards setting system (mainly stakeholder driven) and defined qualifications. The following *types* of qualifications (that can be registered in the NQF) are prescribed:

- National Certificate at levels 1 to 8 where it has 120 (one hundred and twenty) or more credits with 72 (seventy-two) credits at or above the level at which the certificate is registered.
- National Diploma where it has a minimum of 240 (two hundred and forty) credits, of which at least 72 (seventy-two) credits shall be at level 5 or above.
- National First Degree where it has a minimum of 360 (three hundred and sixty) credits of which at least 72 (seventy-two) credits shall be at level 6 or above.

A qualification is defined as:

> …a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose or purposes, including applied competence and a basis for further learning (SAQA, 2000b:8).

and a unit standard as the:

> …registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria, describing the quality of the expected performance (*Ibid.*).

The NSB Regulations further prescribe that qualifications could only be registered on the NQF once they have been approved by SAQA and placed on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). Historically, education and training providers were responsible to develop their own qualifications, however since the establishment of SAQA, the NSBs and SGBs took over this responsibility.

The ETQA Regulations focuse on the role of the quality assurance bodies (these were not to be stakeholder driven – existing bodies, mainly the SETAs and existing statutory professional bodies were to be included). The ETQA regulations also spelled out the requirements that education and training providers had to meet in order to offer NQF-registered qualifications. Two general requirements were: (1) all private providers, i.e. providers that are not government funded, needed to *register* with the DoE (SA, 2002 and SA, 2002b); (2) all providers, public and private, needed to be *accredited* by sector-specific ETQAs (SA, 1998a). At the time of this study, there were 35 ETQAs responsible to quality assure education and training in various sectors (this includes the 25 SETAs), professional and other bodies). All ETQAs were to be responsible to SAQA for their quality assurance functions – this included undergoing regular monitoring (SAQA, 2004i) and auditing cycles (SAQA, 2005).

ACTIVITY 1.3

(1) "Describe" the South African NQF by reflecting on the eight typological components mentioned in the previous section: Guiding philosophy, Purpose, Scope, Prescriptiveness, Incrementalism, Policy breadth, Architecture and Governance.

(2) Discuss the influence of the "size" of a country (i.e. population, number of bodies involved in education and training, diversity, etc) on NQF development and implementation.

1.7 The proposed SADCQF[1]

Although the idea of the SADQF is still in the form of a proposal (SADC TCCA, 2004) it is based on a set broad set of principles that have been developed over the last eight years. It is therefore possible to examine the characteristics of the SADCQF in the light of the NQF typology.

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[1] This section is an extract from a paper by Samuels and Keevy (2005).

The purpose of the framework is about ensuring good communication amongst Member States as outlined on page 2 of the SADCQF document:

> Regional cooperation and solidarity - The SADCQF works at all times within its core competencies to promote cooperation between members to promote peace and prosperity and to ensure good communication in accordance with the intentions of SADC and the broader initiatives taken with in the African Continent. This includes a commitment to the related social and economic goals of combating poverty and promoting equity and global competitiveness (SADC TCCA, 2004:2).

Although there are specific references made to 'a commitment … to combating poverty and promoting equity' (2004:7) this must be seen as something very far from the primary purpose and is raised within the broader context within which the SADC community finds itself.

The understanding of the term framework is indeed very broad. It seen as a:

> …set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and standardised terminology intended to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region, to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications by member states, to harmonise qualifications wherever possible, and to create regional standards where appropriate (SADC TCCA, 2004:9).

Furthermore the proposal recognises the autonomy and inter-relatedness of the areas of learning. It also argues that the sectors of learning (general, academic, vocational and occupational) have different needs and different ways of designing and using qualifications. This understanding with the pragmatic phase-by-phase manner of implementation over a ten-year period suggests that implementation on the one hand will be incremental and secondly will focus on specific areas like TVET. The commitment to the development of national NQFs in specific countries with their scopes focused on vocational qualifications is a clear sign that the scope will be limited but may expand depending on the individual countries and sectoral actors.

Pragmatic phase-by-phase manner of implementation over a ten-year period

The approach that the document adopts is that of a focussing on specific areas and sectors that find common ground and allows for sectoral interests to predominate and in so doing counteracting any idea of prescriptiveness. It also argues for national sovereignty of the member states. Given this "national sovereignty safeguard" in the SADC Protocol that gives the RQF its impetus it is unlikely that it would be prescriptive. One can then safely say that the SADCQF concept is a remarkably "loose" arrangement.

A gradual rate of implementation is preferred in the concept paper. The SADCQF recognises the principle of the development should occur in pragmatic phase-by-phase manner. Feasible practical steps should be taken to reach the outlined vision. It is has taken about eight years of discussion and debate already and in it is envisaged that it will take another ten year period for further implementation. The SADCQF is further reliant on the development of national NQFs. This in our view again points to a gradual rate on implementation.

The SADCQF is remarkably quiet about the linkages of the RQF with other areas of the education and training system and how it fits to entire process. More work is certainly required to see the RQF as part of other strategies for change.

The systems features include outcomes-based qualifications and unitised standards in sectors where it is seen as appropriate. It proposes an eight or ten level framework as a reference point. Much more work would have to be done to clarify the basic terminology and all elements of the features. It might be that the document is too open ended and too cautious in its approach.

One implementing agency without executive powers reporting to a regional steering committee consisting of country NQF representatives which will report to the SADC secretariat which will then report to the Integrated Council of Ministers and finally to the Council of Ministers. The function of the implementing agency is that of coordination, communication, research and support for the RQF and national NQFs.

ACTIVITY 1.4

(1) “Describe” the SADCQF by reflecting on the eight typological components mentioned in the previous section: Guiding philosophy, Purpose, Scope, Prescriptiveness, Incrementalism, Policy breadth, Architecture and Governance.

(2) Compare this description with the one of the South African NQF. List at least five differences.

1.8 Conclusion

By now you should have a reasonable understanding of the various components that make up NQFs. You should also realise that NQFs differ from country to country, and even more so, from region to region. Failure to consider the context wherein an NQF is implemented will have serious consequences. On the other hand, we can learn much from the countries and regions that are already in the process of developing and implementing NQFs.

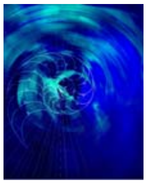
1.9 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The first NQF was implemented in 2000.
2. Only developed first-world countries stand to benefit from NQFs.
3. It is always governments implement NQFs.
4. NQFs development and implementation is usually associated with contestations.
5. NQFs are social constructs that aim to bring together the aims and values of stakeholders.
6. SADC countries will be able to follow the South African example without make any significant changes.
7. The SADCQF is very similar to the South African NQF.

ACTIVITY 1.5

Page to Study Unit 10 (this is the unit that you will be compiling yourself). Complete the section that requires you to formulate a definition of your NQF. Remember that this is only a first attempt and it may change as you get more involved with stakeholders.



STUDY UNIT 2: PHILOSOPHIES THAT GUIDE NQFS

2.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain the origin of the NQF concept
- identify the dominant guiding philosophies that have influenced NQF development in other countries
- explain *how* different philosophies influence NQF development and implementation
- identify the dominant guiding philosophies that may influence NQF development in your country

2.2 Origin of NQFs

The origin of the NQF is found no less than 20 years ago in the UK:

> …the term "NQF" was closely associated with Anglophone countries such as Scotland, New Zealand and Australia, but increasingly many other countries are exploring and developing qualifications frameworks (SAQA, 2005:43).

In a report for the International Labour Office (ILO), Young (2005) gives a succinct overview of the early origins of NQFs. According to Young, one of the first points of departure of NQF development, was in England during the late 1980s, early 1990s, in the context of the then emerging neo-liberal policies that 'emphasised the primary role of the private sector in economic development' (2005:5). He argues that these early developments were rooted in the competence approach to vocational education:

The idea of a national qualifications framework has its intellectual roots in the competence approach to vocational education

> The idea of a national qualifications framework has its intellectual roots in the competence approach to vocational education which was broadened by Jessup (1990) and others in England who developed the idea that all qualifications could (and should) be expressed in terms of outcomes without prescribing learning pathway or programme (Young, 2005:5).

Young also notes that the early NQF developments first surfaced as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) with a very particular political function, namely to transfer 'the control of vocational education from providers to employers' (2005:6). NVQs purposed to certify youth on training schemes for unqualified school leavers creating the perception that NVQs were of a substandard quality:

> It is not surprising that NVQs became associated with low-level qualifications with limited currency in the labour market (Young, 2005:6).

Concurrent with the development of the English competence-based model, the development of the Scottish outcomes-based approach, with a strong focus on lifelong learning (SCQF, 2003:1), provided a useful alternative platform for NQF development in the UK:

> We believe in a culture of lifelong learning where the education system, provision of learning and the benefits of the new technology are focused on making it easier for people to participate in learning at any stage of their lives.

Later, in the mid 1990s, with renewed interest in lifelong learning, the idea of an NQF resurfaced:

> An NQF appeared to offer the possibility of promoting lifelong learning by accrediting all types of learning wherever it took place and whatever the age of the learner (Young, 2005:7).

The roots of NQFs can also be traced back to the original NQF thinking that took place in Scotland and New Zealand:

> A growing number of countries, at very different stages of economic development and with very different cultural and political histories, either have introduced or are in the process of introducing some form of National Qualifications Framework. The policy documents that describe these developments point to considerable agreement on both the form that these national frameworks are taking and the policy goals that it is hoped they will achieve. There is also evidence of considerable 'borrowing' of structures and design principles that were originally formulated in industrial countries such as England, Scotland and New Zealand, where the early NQF developments were introduced in the 1980s (Young, 2005:1).

There is also evidence of considerable 'borrowing' of structures and design principles that were originally formulated in industrial countries such as England, Scotland and New Zealand…

Although it cannot be disputed that England and Scotland provided the "intellectual roots" of NQF development, the first NQF was developed in New Zealand in 1989 (Blackmur, 2004). The New Zealand NQF was developed within its own context and did not try to replicate the progress made in the UK. Australia and South Africa followed in 1995 (Keating, 2003 and SA, 1995). As might be expected, the contexts in the different countries vary, and more significantly, the purpose, period of implementation, and scope of NQFs differ; even so, they all show remnants of the early thinking as well as a distinct political connotation, as noted by Samuels and Keevy (2005b:3) in a discussion on the SADCQF:

> The origins of national qualifications frameworks as we know them today can be found within the confides of our former colonial powers…Importantly, these early NQF roots are also associated with significant political manoeuvring…

In many cases, NQF critics use and target this underlying thinking in an attempt to further their cause. NQF implementers, such as governments and regional consortia, also further their own agendas by advocating a school of thought that is best suited to them. NQF implementers also argue that it is this fundamental underbuild of a NQF that is to the best advantage to the education and training system in a particular country. The conflicting agendas more often than not, lead to significant contestations and challenges for power – in some cases evident during the conceptualisation period, in others they surface much later, often resulting in the withdrawal of a particular sector or stakeholder grouping from the NQF process. In most countries, with the exception of South Africa, the withdrawal and/or initial distantiation of the Higher Education sector was the most apparent example of such conflicting agendas.

ACTIVITY 2.1

(1) List the key points in the development of the NQF concept.

(2) Do you think it is important to realise that NQFs originate from outside Africa? If so, why? Which features do we need to embrace? Which do we need to be wary of?

2.3 Guiding philosophies that influence NQFs

Post-Fordism

In the very early stages of NQF implementation in South Africa McGrath (1997:171) raised concerns of possible *post-Fordism* influences (also see Young, 1998:57):

> Such a [national exclusivist NQF] model, if it had an overall guiding philosophy, might owe most to pro-employer versions of post-Fordism, with work intensification and felixibilisation as preferred responses to the challenge of globalisation.

Neo-liberalism

Allais raised concerns of *neo-liberalism* as recently as 2003:

> Some commentators believe that the real purposes of NQFs are based on hidden political and economic agendas. Allais (2003), for example, argues that while the rhetoric of the South African NQF relates to democratic transformation, its content is derived from the political goal of developing a neo-liberal economy (Tuck *et al*, 2004:4).

Technicism, vocationalism and undesirable standardisation

Concerns, particularly from higher education sector (Luckett, 1999:1) often include reference to a more *technical humanistic* paradigm, wherein the focus of the education system is on economic advance:

> Operating within the requirements of the NQF demands a shift to a more technical paradigm, in which vocational/human capital discourse is overlaid with radical humanist discourses…education is now viewed as having to serve an economic rather than social good.

In 1998 Gevers raised concerns, identified from the Australian and New Zealand processes, of a drift towards *vocationalism* and undesirable *standardisation* – an emphasis on outcomes, which were overly reductionist and behaviorist. McGrath (1997), as well as Allias and Shalem (2005), support the concern expressed by Gevers:

> …the more serious and rigorous the attempts to specify the domain being assessed, the narrower and narrower the domain itself becomes, without, in fact, becoming fully transparent. The attempt to map our free-standing content and standards leads, again and again, to a never-ending spiral of specification which never manages to remove the ambiguity from the standards (Wolf, 1995 in Allias and Shalem, 2005: 5).

Forced integration of epistemological different modes of learning

The forced integration of the *epistemological different modes of learning* were also raised by many authors:

> Formal education and the NQF thus rest on two fundamentally different assumptions about knowledge, knowing and identity. Formal education and training aim to specialise academic and or professional identities through induction into largely disciplinary-based forms of knowledge, whereas the NQF wishes to background knowledge and emphasise a generic capacity to learn (Ensor, 2003:341).

Heyns and Needham (2004:42) do however note that the concerns about epistemological differences may underlie the more obvious political power struggles:

> We are also not convinced that the *Consultative Document* [DoE and DoL, 2003], in particular, is honest about its concerns about epistemological differences – for observers it seems that it is the political power struggles, rather than the epistemological concerns, that are inhibiting the development of a common, agreed understanding of an integrated national framework for learning achievements.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning was an important influence on the NQF. Even in recent times, various authors, both within the South African context (see Walters, 2003 and Aitichison, 2004) and outside (e.g. in Latin America and Caribbean) query the extent to which NQFs facilitate lifelong learning:

> The concept of an NQF has a direct connection with lifelong learning which “encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications”. One of the greatest benefits of an NQF is that it facilitates a reference for lifelong learning and for progress in work and social life (Zuniga, 2004:12).

ACTIVITY 2.2

(1) Can you think of more “guiding philosophies” that may influence NQF development and implementation? What about globalisation and pragmatism?

(2) Identify and explain the dominant guiding philosophies that may influence NQF development in your country.

2.4 Conclusion

In summary, scholars note a variety of possible underlying philosophies that influence NQFs - most of them well argued and substantiated. The question may be asked, what was the purpose of discussing these various underlying philosophies? The intention has been to show that all NQFs, whether established or just emerging, are influenced, even covertly guided, by the implicit underlying thinking from which they emerge.

The proposed SADCQF is a case in point. The strong focus in many of the SADC countries has traditionally been on Vocational Education and Training (VET) – therefore influenced by vocationalism and unitisation – the stakeholders that are currently involved in the establishment of the SADCQF are mostly from this constituency.

More examples are found in the recent developments in Latin America and the Caribbean. Interestingly these developments have publicly embraced the labour competency approach that characterised NQF the early developments in the England in the early 1990s (Zuniga, 2004). Although this move is completely overt, it is also an example of a region that is too a large extent only starting to engage with NQF-related issues, importantly (and ironically) with exactly the same issues that influenced other NQFs when they were just starting.

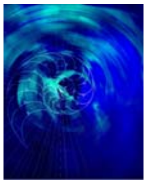
2.5 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The South African NQF was modelled on the New Zealand NQF.
2. NQFs can be seen as the “new colonisation” of Africa.
3. Only vocational qualifications are included on NQFs.
4. NQFs lead to the over-simplification of skills and competencies.
5. NQFs are often plagued by power struggles.
6. SADC countries will become more globally competitive of they have NQFs.

ACTIVITY 2.3

Page to Study Unit 10. Complete the section that requires you to reflect on the guiding philosophies that may (covertly or even overtly) influence the development of your NQF.



STUDY UNIT 3: PURPOSES OF NQFS

3.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the tensions between overt and covert purposes of NQFs
- list and explain at least five different purposes of NQFs
- discuss the purpose of your NQF in detail

3.2 Overview

Closely linked to the “covert purposes” or guiding philosophies of NQFs discussed in the previous study unit, are the more overt and explicit purposes.

Although it may be argued that the overarching purpose of all NQFs is to ‘increase the seamlessness of education and training systems’ (Keating, 2003:280, also see Tuck *et al*, 2004), it is possible to identify a number of more specific “clusters” that describe the purposes of NQFs. According to Tuck *et al* (2004), drawing on Granville (2003), the main purposes for developing an NQF can be clustered as follows:

The overarching purpose of all NQFs is to increase the seamlessness of education and training systems

(1) addressing issues of social justice;
(2) improving access to the qualifications system and progression within it; and
(3) establishing standards, achieving comparability and intra-national or international benchmarking.

Two more dimensions of purpose are suggested by Bouder (2003):

(4) qualifications as instruments of communication; and
(5) qualifications as instruments of regulation.

Each of the clusters is discussed below (keeping in mind that they are not necessarily distinct).

3.3 Addressing social justice purpose

When looking for an example of an NQF that purposes to address issues of social justice, the South African NQF features prominently (Granville, 2003). Granville (2004:4) also points out that is this overt concern that makes the South African situation of particular interest to the international community:

> The South African situation is therefore of particular interest to the international community because of its overt concern with the meaning of citizenship and participatory democracy.

In countries such as South Africa and Namibia social justice features prominently:

> South Africa and Namibia, in particular, have a transformation and redress agenda, but it is also clear that most countries where NQFs have (or are being) implemented have a broader view of the benefits of an NQF (SAQA, 2005b:45).
>
> In South Africa, the introduction of the NQF based on learning outcomes aims to "address the inappropriate social use of qualifications that has been part of [the country's] history"… (Stephenson, 2003:333).
>
> The [South African] NQF is about interrogating our society's uses of qualifications… (Isaacs, 2001:126).
>
> The [Namibian] NQF is not a re-arrangement and/or collation of existing qualifications, but implies a transformation of education and training and the recognition of learning and qualifications which result from it (Gertze, 2003:74).

This is in comparison to other countries such as Lesotho (2004), New Zealand (see Richardson, 1999), Scotland and Ireland where the 'primary focus of the NQF is on access and progression' (Tuck *et al*, 2004:3):

> The SCQF's aims are more limited than those of frameworks which set out to develop new qualifications, standards or curricula, or to enhance the quality of education and training. Above all, the SCQF is an enabling or descriptive framework; it "is not a regulatory framework" (Raffe, 2003: 241).
>
> The aim of qualifications frameworks is to clarify (for students, parents, employers and policy makers) the main routes to a particular qualification, how progress within the system can be made, to which extent transfer is allowed and on which basis decisions on recognition are taken (European Commission, 2004:1).

Further support that most NQFs have some form of social purpose is found in the "social construct" argument (see Study Unit 1). Featuring more prominently in the South African example, the NQF is interpreted as being 'negotiated for the people, by the people' (CONOCER, 1999:8).

The point to be made is that many NQFs have some extent of a social purpose. Placed on a continuum, South Africa is on the most radical extreme, while New Zealand, Scotland and Ireland have some components. The more recent developments of regional qualifications frameworks (RQFs) in SADC, CARICOM and the EU (Clark, 2005) show the least focus on addressing social justice.

3.4 Improving access and progression purpose

As was argued for *social purpose*, most NQFs also incorporate at least some elements of *access and progression*. Young (2003) refers to three goals 'which appear to be widely shared across different countries and are found in almost every national and international policy document on qualifications frameworks':

- transparency of what the NQF signifies and what learners have to achieve;
- minimise barriers to progression; and
- maximise access, flexibility and portability between different sectors of education and work and different sites of learning.

As an example, the second objective of the South African NQF is to:

> Facilitate *access* to and *mobility* and *progression* within education, training and career path (SAQA, 2000b:5, NQF Objective 2, emphasis added).

More example are identified from other NQFs:

> [The purpose of the SADCQF is to fulfil] the SADC Protocol on education and training, including harmonisation of qualifications and learning programmes along with improved *mobility* and *exchange* of learners and trained labour (TCCA, 2005:9, emphasis added).
>
> The SCQF provides a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities and thereby makes the relationships between qualifications clearer. It will clarify entry and exit points, and routes for progression within and across education and training sectors and increase the opportunities for credit transfer (SCQF, 2003:vi).
>
> The [Irish] national framework of qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry and to promote transfer and progression (NQAI, 2003:7).
>
> [NQFs] lower barriers to access and progression (Clark, 2005:3).

According to Tuck *et al* (2004) this cluster normally includes objectives such as: making the qualifications system easier to understand; making progression routes easier and so improving career mobility; increasing and improving credit transfer between qualifications; improving the recognition of prior learning; and improving access to education and training opportunities.

3.5 Establishing standards, comparability and benchmarking purpose

RQFs, such as the proposed SADCQF, Caribbean RQF and the EQF, stand out as the most extreme examples of frameworks that purpose mainly to achieve benchmarking and comparability:

> The proposed SADCQF is a regional qualifications framework that consists of a set of agreed principles, practices, procedures and *standardised terminology* intended to ensure effective *comparability* of qualifications and credits across borders in the SADC region, to facilitate *mutual recognition* of qualifications by Member States, to *harmonise* qualifications wherever possible, and to create *regional standards* where appropriate (TCCA, 2005:29, emphasis added).
>
> An EQF could thus add value to national education and training systems by facilitating *comparisons* between frameworks and systems (European Commission, 2004:2, emphasis added).
>
> The objective here is purely *descriptive*, the aim is to facilitate *comparisons* and to review the progress of the competencies approach in the [Caribbean] region (Zuniga, 2004:11, emphasis added).

It is however not only the RQFs that purpose to establish standards, comparability and benchmarking. Examples include the New Zealand NQF designed to rationalise historically diverse qualifications and so to provide a common structure onto which new qualifications could be added (Richardson, 1999) and the Mexican model that purposes to initiate structural reform to raise quality, flexibility and relevance (CONOCER, 1999).

It is important to note that comparability and benchmarking are not regarded by all as obtainable. Blackmur (1999), in a critique of the concept of an NQF, argues that the Scottish authorities 'have accepted that equivalence has a quicksilver dimension to it and that "broadly comparable" is the best that can be hoped for'.

A number of overarching objectives of this third cluster are noted by Tuck *et al* (2004): rationalising qualifications by removing duplication of provision; ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived social and economic needs; ensuring that education and training standards are defined and applied consistently; ensuring that education and training providers meet certain quality standards; and securing international recognition for national qualifications.

3.6 Instruments of communication purpose

Young (2005) argues that all NQFs have a communicative role in that they describe interrelationships between qualifications and how learners can progress from one level to another. Young goes on to suggest that these more limited frameworks, focusing mainly on communication, are "enabling" frameworks as opposed to the more prescriptive regulatory role that other frameworks can take (discussed in the next section). Frameworks focusing mainly on communication are also less prone to contestation, but on the other hand, can have a much more limited role as they are based on voluntary participation and relying on agreements between stakeholders.

Three frameworks stand out as enabling/communicative frameworks: Australia's AQF, Scotland's SCQF and the proposed French framework. It is important to note that the French development has recently moved closer to the more restrictive 'Anglo-Saxon notion' of an NQF, giving the State 'a powerful tool to organise the qualification "market:' (Bouder, 2003:356). This is in contradiction to the more general trend of NQFs becoming less restrictive (e.g. the 3rd generation NQFs).

The proposed RQFs focus strongly on communication, Gordon (2005:4) for example states that the EQF is required to 'facilitate communication' between the NQFs of the Member States and systems.

3.7 Instruments of regulation purpose

Starting with a more general view of regulation, Niklasson (1996:268) argues that regulation is used as a general term for 'government steering and control and suggests that 'the regulator should, as the English proverb goes, "speak softly and carry a big stick"' (996:271). Moja *et al* (in Cloete *et al*, 2002:89) introduce three types of state regulation:

- State control – effective and systematic administration of education and training
- State supervision – government provides the broad regulatory framework within which providers of education and training are expected to produce the results which governments desire
- State interference – arbitrary forms of crisis intervention and include a conflation of the political and professional

The three types of regulation appear to be positioned in three distinct levels, with state control being the most severe form of regulation, and state interference suggesting a much more arbitrary and non-continuous approach. The current South African situation would most probably be best placed in the "State control" position, although it has elements of "State supervision" in that the state has a direct interest but also provides a strong regulatory framework.

In addition to the link between governmental control and the level of this control, Berka *et al* (2000:21) suggest that there are five areas of control:

- pedagogical-didactical area;
- structure of the education system;
- curriculum and its assessment;
- human resources; and
- financial and material matters.

Focusing the discussion on regulation on NQFs, Young (2003, in Tuck *et al*, 2004:4) argues that governments embrace the idea of an NQF because it 'provides mechanisms for accountability and control'. Seen as part of and international trend on the part of governments, qualifications are used as *drivers of educational reform*. Young suggests that this may be because government agendas are not necessarily focused on improving the quality of education and training – NQFs rather provide governments with instruments of accountability.

The South African NQF stands out as an extreme example of the use of an NQF to regulate an education and training system (Blackmur, 2004). The NQF had indeed become a very powerful tool and education had without any doubt stayed subjugated to politics.

On face value, the regulatory purposes of some NQFs may seem to be the main cause for contestation and power struggles. In the case of the implementation and development of the South African NQF, regulatory purpose may be a contributing factor, probably the most obvious, but by far, not the most significant.

3.8 Conclusion

This study unit, focusing on the purposes of NQFs, has highlighted a number of important points:

Tensions between overt and covert purposes

Philosophies that underlie NQFs, more often than not, stand at odds with their more overt purposes. Covert purposes, whether originating from the underlying philosophies or not, whether explicit or implicit, form part of NQF implementation across the world. Without trying to excavate a "conspiracy theory" it has been shown NQFs are influenced by both sets of purposes, which in turn can lead to increased contestations and power struggles.

Purposes common to most NQFs

1st, 2nd and 3rd generation NQFs all purpose to improve access and progression, establish standards, comparability and benchmarking and communication, albeit with different degrees of emphasis. Although social purpose and regulation also feature as purposes of many NQFs, they do so on much greater levels of extremity. These "common" purposes appear less prone to contestations and are more focused on commonly accepted principles.

Purposes common to only some NQFs

Social justice, interpreted as a more extreme version of social transformation, and regulation stand out as two purposes that are *not* common to most NQFs, at least in their more extreme manifestations. Both the South African and New Zealand NQFs are such examples – both NQFs were continually plagued by contestations and subsequent review processes. Obviously social justice and regulation purposes are an important factor to consider when investigating the NQF development and implementation, although this lead to another question: to what extent would NQFs be NQFs without some measure of social and regulatory purpose? Tuck *et al* (2004:3) go some way to answering the question:

> The essence of the distinction is between using a framework to describe the existing system and seeking to effect change using an NQF as the vehicle.

The essence of the distinction is between using a framework to describe the existing system and seeking to effect change using an NQF as the vehicle

ACTIVITY 3.1

(1) Which purposes are most prone to contestations and power struggles? Is there any merit in aspiring to such purposes even though they may lead to contestations?

(2) Explain the following paradox: “NQFs that purpose to achieve the least are often the most successful”.

(3) What is the envisaged purpose of your NQF? Is it to describe the existing system? To transform the existing system? Something else?

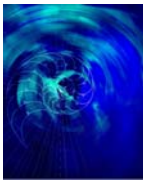
3.9 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. Most NQFs have similar purposes.
2. South Africa and Namibia are the only countries that have used their NQFs to transform their education and training systems.
3. NQFs can only be effective if they have some measure of regulatory purpose.
4. Newer, 3rd generation NQFs have all opted for less regulatory and more communicative purposes.

ACTIVITY 3.2

Page to Study Unit 10. Complete the section that requires you to reflect on the purpose of your NQF.



STUDY UNIT 4: SCOPE OF NQFS

4.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by the scope of an NQF
- explain the different dimensions of scope
- discuss the Howieson and Raffe classification system for the scope of NQFs and give examples of each
- discuss the effects of globalisation on unification
- discuss the scope of your NQF in detail

4.2 Overview

The scope of NQFs includes two dimensions:

The *first dimension* refers to the integration of: levels (e.g. inclusion of university qualifications); sectors (e.g. occupational sector and geographical region); and types (e.g. academic, vocational, private, public) of qualifications that form part of NQFs vary from country to country. In many SADC countries, but also to some extent in the UK, developments have focused mainly on the vocational education and training (VET) sector. General education, specifically higher education, is often excluded, both during the development of the framework, and in actual registration of qualifications on the framework.

The *second dimension* of scope is the relationships between the categories or systems, depending on how these are structured, in the relevant countries. In some cases these relationships are explicitly defined, even prescribed, whilst in others is left for roleplayers to negotiate.

A classification system developed by Howieson and Raffe (1992) is particularly useful to further define the scope of NQFs. They suggest three systems, each based on a different relationship between education and vocational systems:

- unified - all systems are integrated
- linked - separate systems but with common structures for transferability
- tracked - separate systems with limited transferability

4.3 Unified scope

In a unified system there are no tracks - vocational and educational qualifications form part of the same unified system. Raffe (2002) defines unification as bringing academic education and vocational training closer together. Above all, Raffe warns that unification is a *political process* that will conflict with the goals and interests of stakeholders:

Unification is a political process that will conflict with the goals and interests of stakeholders

> …unification is not simply a technical matter of designing and implementing a better system; it is above all a political process. The goals of unification may conflict with the interests of stakeholders who have the power to block, neutralise or modify them (*Ibid.*, 7).

Raffe argues that three different unifying measures bring academic and vocational learning closer together:

- Measures that aim to unify academic and vocational *curricula* – Raffe (*Ibid.*) suggests that this can be done through an: (1) *additive approach* that 'encourages a greater mixing of academic and vocational components, but does not try to blur the differences between them' (*Ibid*., 3); (2) *integrative approach* that 'aims to create a new kind of curriculum, rather than simply mix academic and vocational elements' (*Ibid.*).
- Measures that aim to reduce the *organisational* distance between academic and vocational learning – in this case unification is the process of linking tracks or pathways, such as vocational, technical, general or academic.
- Measures that aim to reduce the distance between vocational and academic learning in *longitudinal* terms – this may involve measures to 'make learning available in more flexible forms and in a variety of modes and contexts, which transcend the barriers often associated with the distinction between academic and vocational study' (*Ibid.*).

Raffe defines the terms vocational and academic in terms of the three unifying measures:

Curricular	Organisational	Longitudinal
Distinction based on content of learning and the extent to which this is designed to prepare individuals for roles in the labour market	Terms describe the main tracks or pathways to which upper-secondary students are allocated, and the expected progression from these tracks	Terms describe the individual purposes for learning

As was the case with the purposes of NQFs (discussed in the previous section) the two NQFs that stand out again are South Africa and New Zealand (Richardson, 1999 and Philips, 2003) - a concerted effort was made to integrate all levels sectors and types of qualifications into a single unified framework:

> …a further reason for the establishment of [the South Africa] NQF is to provide a coherent structure for education, a means by which divisions between sectors of learning and the variety of providers of education can be bridged and the division between "theory" associated with general education and "application" associated with vocational education and training can be diminished (Oberholzer, 1994:3).

> [New Zealand] Government policy in the early 1990s centred on the creation of a seamless education system, based on unit standards. This was to integrate secondary education, industry training and tertiary education. The NQF was to bring together the developments in general education and vocational education and training into an integrated model (Richardson, 1999:4).

4.4 Linked scope

In a linked system, the vocational and educational tracks are still separate, but with significant common structures to enable effective transfer between the tracks. All three the proposed RQFs appear to favour a linked scope:

> [The proposed SADCQF] covers all forms, levels and categories of education and training including qualifications that vary from country to country. The basic principle is one on inclusiveness encompassing areas within general education, the vocational education and training sector, the higher education sector and recognition for non-formal learning (TCCA, 2005:20).

> [The proposed EQF] will not only link qualifications framework systems in different countries but will build bridges between different settings for learning, whether school, university, the workplace or in civic or personal life (Gordon, 2005:2).

> One activity in particular which stands out in bringing together government, employers and unions to better coordinate the linkage between competencies and jobs has been the development of common vocational qualifications [in the Caribbean] (Gamerdinger, 2000 in Zuniga, 2004:66).

Australia, Mexico (CONOCER, 1999) and the UK (excluding Scotland) are examples of linked systems, even though they appear to moving towards a combination of unified and linked (Tuck *et al*, 2004).

4.5 Tracked scope

Before the advent of NQFs, most education and training systems were tracked systems wherein schooling, VET and university education were seen as distinct and largely unrelated. In a tracked system, vocational and educational tracks are separate, with very limited transferability. Placed at the very extreme of the scope continuum, some even argue, that tracked systems are not NQFs at all (cf. Tuck *et al*, 2004).

The South African NQF was envisioned as a unified system although, after some concessions were made, it started out as a linked system (see the discussion above). From the subsequent review processes, yet to be concluded, suggestions ranged from a combination of unified and linked, to completely tracked (DoE, 2004).

ACTIVITY 4.1

What are the advantages of a tracked NQF? How do these compare with a linked or unified NQF?

4.6 Conclusion

Most countries have opted for a linked or unified system, often ending up with a combination of the two (Howieson *et al*, 2000:2, also Tuck *et al*, 2004):

> Each national system is likely to be a mixture of the three types [unified, linked and tracked]: its position on the continuum between tracked and unified systems may vary across different dimensions of systemic change.

Each national system is likely to be a mixture of the three types

In developing a conceptual framework for studying the unification of academic and vocational learning in post-compulsory education and training systems, Howieson *et al* (2000) suggest three elements that require consideration:

(1) distinction among the three types of systems;
(2) dimensions of systemic change (grouped into four areas: content and processes, system architecture, delivery and government and regulation);
(3) distinction between *open* and *grouped* unified systems - an *open* unified system is described as having a ‘weak prescription of the content, volume, level, mode and duration of study; the emphasis is on choice and flexible entry and exit points’ (*Ibid.*) whereas a *grouped* unified system, although based on common learning requirements, has stronger focus on ‘prescription of content, volume and level of study’ (*Ibid.*) – importantly, they note that the extent to which a unified system if open or grouped depends on the role of the national state in the governance of the system.

The following table (adapted from the Howieson *et al* and SAQA, 2005b) summarises the dimensions of systemic change:

Type of system (Scope) *Dimension of systemic change*	**Unified**	**Linked**	**Tracked**
Overview	No tracks, single system	Different tracks exist with emphasis on similarities and equivalence, common structures and limited credit transfer between tracks	Vocational and general education organised in separate and distinctive tracks
Content and process	Multiple purposes, pluralist ethos, curriculum integrates academic and vocational, common assessment methodology	Overlaps and common elements and features	Distinct purpose, ethos, content, learning processes and assessment methodologies for each track
System architecture	Single certification system, flexible entry points, credit accumulation, single progression ladder, all programs lead to HE	Certification that links tracks (e.g. overarching diplomas), course structures allow transfer and combinations, conditions of progression vary across tracks	Different certification for each track, different course structures, progression to higher education not always possible
Delivery	Single type of institution, single system covers different modes	Variable/overlapping institutions, tracks partially based on mode	Different institutions and modes for different tracks
Government and regulation	Single administrative and regulatory system	Mixed/variable organisational structures	Different structures for different tracks

In summary, the following relevant points have emerged form the discussion on the scope of NQFs:

Pressures to pursue unification

Raffe (2002:6) argues that ‘most countries pursue all three types of unification but with differences in emphasis’. He ascribes this to two types of pressures:

External pressures (i.e. external to the education system), such as *globalisation* - it is claimed that new skills are required which transcend the dichotomy between academic and vocational learning; and *social pressures:*

> There are pressures for education to become more inclusive, to extent access, to make learning opportunities more flexible, to

> unblock dead-ends and to reduce the risks associated with participation and progression in education (2002:5).

Stromquist (2004:7) makes a similar argument by suggesting that '[g]lobalisation brings education to the front lines' and answering the question of what globalisation doing to knowledge? It is becoming a commodity…'When knowledge is a commodity, then schools and universities are market places, not terrains that contribute to redress inequalities' (*Ibid.*).

Internal pressures are specific to each country: e.g. the need for redress and parity of esteem between vocational training and education in South Africa. The usually have generic origins, including attempts to promote parity of esteem (the example mentioned above), responses to academic drift (the tendency for young people to choose academic courses even if they are not the most appropriate) and the expansion of post-compulsory education and training systems:

> Unification is the response to this growing functional interdependence and the resulting needs for co-ordination and coherence. Academic drift, expansion and functional complexity are generic problems which affect nearly all countries, but they are manifested in different ways in each country (*Ibid.*, 5).

Raffe then asks the obvious question: Is unification leading systems to converge? It appears *not* to be the case. He refers to a number of studies on the effects of globalisation that 'cast doubt on the notion of convergence' (2002:9). These studies show that:

- most education systems face similar challenges and pressures;
- countries often use common concepts and policy rhetoric (lifelong learning, parity of esteem, flexibility of pathways) to analyse these challenges and to design policy responses;
- there is considerable variation in the strategies and polices which countries adopt and even more variation in the outcomes of the policies; and
- there is *limited evidence of convergence* in the structure of education and training systems.

The third finding suggests that there is a great variation in strategies that countries adopt – although not on complete disagreement with this statement, it more probable that by 2005 (three years later), as has been shown on various occasions in this study on the South African NQF, that NQFs have increasingly become the strategy that countries adopt to cope with external and internal pressures.

Aggregation towards unified/linked systems

Young (2003:223) asks a rhetorical question: who (at least at the level of 'rhetoric or broad goals') would disagree with qualifications that are to be 'more linked to each other and to exhibit greater transparency?' From the discussion in this section it is apparent that most NQFs, whether 1st, 2nd or 3rd generational, and largely unrelated to their specific purposes, appear to be moving towards a scope somewhere between unified and linked, wherein qualifications are linked to each other in more open and transparent systems.

A tracked scope appears to be too limited for NQFs as, to a large extent, it represents education and training systems before the advent of NQFs. Arguments that tracked systems are not NQFs at all support this notion. Even the French system, based mainly on an existing (tracked) classification system, appears to be moving towards a more unified position, as exemplified in Bouder's (2003) description of France's NQF legislation:

> [The proposed French NQF is] a superstructure into which all qualifications would have to be squeezed.

The Irish NQF (NQAI, 2003:8, emphasis added), that focuses more on access and progression, also clearly embraces a more unified scope:

> The vision for the [Irish] framework is it would be inclusive and comprehensive. The aim is that it will be the "*single, nationally and internationally accepted entity*, through which *all* learning achievements may be measured and related to each other".

Aggregation towards the "relationships" dimension of scope

The first dimension of scope (integration of levels, sectors and types) appears to be less than successful – possible not due to the fact that it is less achievable, or even less desired, but more so as the push for total integration acts as a catalyst for power struggles in the different levels, sectors and constituencies. The South African debate of *integration* vs. an *integrated approach* is a good example where the initial position was systematically replaced (even re-interpreted) with less contradictory relationships. The Howieson *et al* (2000) conceptual framework provides a useful starting point for considering the implications for the different dimensions of systemic change of the aggregation of NQFs towards unified/linked scopes.

Unification leads to diversification

This point relates to the previous one. The limited evidence of convergence in the structure of education and training systems does not necessarily mean that unification is impossible to achieve, it could also mean that it is just too soon to say (Samuels *et al*, 2005) – this argument may very well work in the South African context but what about countries that have had a longer period of NQF implementation? With the exception of South Africa, not one of the other five 1st generation NQFs proclaim to be unified any longer, even if they were so in earlier years – New Zealand is a case in point. Neither do any of the remaining 2nd and 3rd generation NQFs.

ACTIVITY 4.2

If attempts to unify the various components of an education and training systems lead to diversification how can this tension be manged?

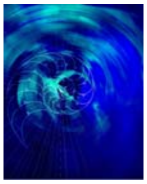
4.7 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The South African NQF is the only NQF that has a unified scope.
2. NQFs with a tracked scope are ineffective.
3. Unification leads to diversification.
4. Globalisation has lead to most NQFs becoming more unified.
5. It may be more advantageous to keep the higher education sector out of the NQF.

ACTIVITY 4.3

Turn to Study Unit 10. In the section on Scope, discuss the extent to which you envisage your NQF to be unified.



STUDY UNIT 5: PRESCRIPTIVENESS OF NQFS

5.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by the prescriptiveness of an NQF
- list examples of “loose” and “tight” NQFs
- discuss the different combinations of scope and prescriptiveness of NQFs
- discuss the prescriptiveness of your NQF in detail

5.2 Overview

Raffe (2003, in Tuck *et al*, 2004:5) defines perceptiveness as:

> …the stringency of the criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included.

Raffe suggests two dimensions of prescriptiveness: the *micro level stringency* of criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included on the NQF, and the *systemic requirements* such as quality assurance and standards setting processes.

In comparison Young (2005:14) defines prescriptiveness as the:

> …capacity of a [NQF] to achieve the goals set out by government.

Young also suggest two dimensions of prescriptiveness: the *number of criteria* that are listed in defining the NQF; and the *degree of prescription* that is used.

Micro level and systemic requirements

Raffe’s first, as well as Young’s two dimensions of prescriptiveness are very similar, in that they refer to the extent of the *micro level requirements* and criteria associated with an NQF. Examples include the format of qualifications and the specification of RPL possibilities for a particular qualification. Raffe’s second dimension is concerned with the extent of *systemic requirements*. Examples are the criteria education and training providers have to meet before they can be accredited, and the requirement that all new qualifications have to developed (and approved) through standards setting structures.

Young (2003) argues for two extremes on a prescriptiveness continuum: *strong* frameworks that are very prescriptive about qualification design and quality assurance across a range, if not all, sectors; *weak* frameworks that are based on general agreement and focus much more on practicalities. Tuck *et al* (2004:5) suggest that the term *weak* has derogatory connotations and should be replaced with *loose*, and therefore also *strong* with *tight*.

5.3 Loose prescriptiveness

Loose NQFs are characterised by general agreement between stakeholders, a focus on practicalities, limited criteria that qualifications have to meet in order to be registered on the NQF and few systemic requirements. According to Tuck *et al* (2004) most loose frameworks have the following characteristics:

- acknowledge differences between sectors;
- purpose to be instruments of communication, regulating only to some extent;
- have a linked or unified scope.

Examples of loose frameworks that are somewhat prescriptive on micro and systemic levels, include the Australian AQF, which allows a high degree of autonomy to sectors, but still prescribes clear guidelines for minimum compliance:

> The quality assurance processes integral to the [Australian] NQF are systemic and non prescriptive. Qualification developers and providers must provide evidence that their products and services meet publicly documented criteria (Richardson, 1999:4).

Importantly in the Australian context, the decision was taken very soon that a "single-model-fits-all" approach was not feasible (*Ibid.*)

All three the proposed RQFs, the EQF, the Caribbean RQF and the SADCQF are significantly orientated towards looseness, e.g.: the proposed EQF is implemented on a voluntary basis without any legal obligations (European Commission, 2004); the proposed SADCQF 'allows for sectoral interests to predominate and counteract any idea of prescriptiveness' (Samuels and Keevy, 2005:9).

Loose frameworks, such as those mentioned above, do not, in most cases, have a regulatory purpose. In this context, the AQF is somewhat of an anomaly. Despite the accommodation of autonomy in sectors and its claims of non-prescriptiveness it does prescribe minimum micro level compliance. In effect the AQF anomaly highlights an important characteristic of NQFs: very few NQFs, that is other than the three regional developments, can claim to be completely non-prescriptive. In some cases NQFs are less prescriptive on a systemic level (such as the AQF) but are still prescriptive on a micro level. As was argued earlier in the case of a linked scope, it may even be doubtful if an NQF that is positioned on the furthest extreme of the loose-tight continuum is an NQF at all.

In some cases NQFs are less prescriptive on a systemic level but are still prescriptive on a micro level

5.4 Tight prescriptiveness

Tight NQFs are prescriptive about qualification design and quality assurance and prescribe very stringent criteria that qualifications have to meet in order to be registered on the NQF. Extensive accreditation and standards setting systems are usually established:

> In strong [tight] frameworks, strict requirements are laid down for including a qualification on the framework (Young, 2005:14).

According to Tuck *et al* (2004) most *tight* frameworks have the following characteristics:

- assume that one size fits all, i.e. common rules and procedures can be applied to different sectors of education and training;
- purpose to address issues of social justice;
- purpose to be instruments of regulation;
- a unified scope, particularly when they apply the same regulatory mechanisms across all sectors.

South Africa, New Zealand and even some features of the Scottish system are associated with tight frameworks (*Ibid.*, 7). The following is an example of tightness in the New Zealand NQF:

> …they key components of the [New Zealand] NQF would be the national register of qualifications meeting specified criteria…mechanisms for registration of providers and accreditation of courses or programmes leading to qualifications… (Philips, 2003:291).

Tight frameworks become powerful tools in the hands of governments

In general, tight frameworks become powerful tools in the hands of governments that use their NQFs for social justice purposes and regulating national education and training systems:

> Governments tend to want to move towards strong [tight] frameworks as they provide greater potential both in relation to coordination and accountability (Young, 2005:14).

5.5 Conclusions

The following relevant points have emerged from the prescriptiveness discussion:

Prescriptiveness is contentious

Most authors would agree that the degree of presciptiveness has been one of the most contentious aspect of the implementation of NQFs, more so the first generation:

> The implementation of tight frameworks has generally been associated with controversy and contestation, largely arising from resistance in the university and school sectors to what may be perceived as the imposition of alien and inappropriate ideas and processes imported from VET (Tuck *et al*, 2004:7).

South Africa and New Zealand (to some extent even Scotland) stand out as NQFs that have been reviewed and reinvented often to the detriment of their education and training systems. Although the New Zealand system appears to have settled much more towards the looser side of the continuum, the South Africa NQF officially still remains highly prescriptive and regulatory – immanent changes regarding its scope (i.e. to be less unified, probably even tracked) and architecture (significant structural changes are envisaged) prove the point. In contrast, neither the overt purpose of the South African NQF, nor its incrementalism (see the next section) or policy breadth (also discussed later in this section) have been scrutinised to any similar extent.

Tight frameworks are less likely to remain unified

According to Tuck *et al* tight and loose frameworks ‘are distinguished primarily by the position taken on *integration*’ (2004:5, emphasis in the original). As was discussed in the previous section on *scope*, the degree of integration required in a unified NQF is extremely contentious. Attempts at suggesting an *integrated approach* rather than an integrated framework was one way of dealing with the problem (Raffe, 2002), as noted by Heyns and Needham (2004:5):

> …the goal of an integrated system was replaced by the idea of an “integrated approach” to education and training. The notion of an “integrated approach” was considered a setback to the development and implementation of the NQF. Isaacs, for example, predicted [in 1998] that this shift in nuance ‘is going to come back and haunt us. Indeed.

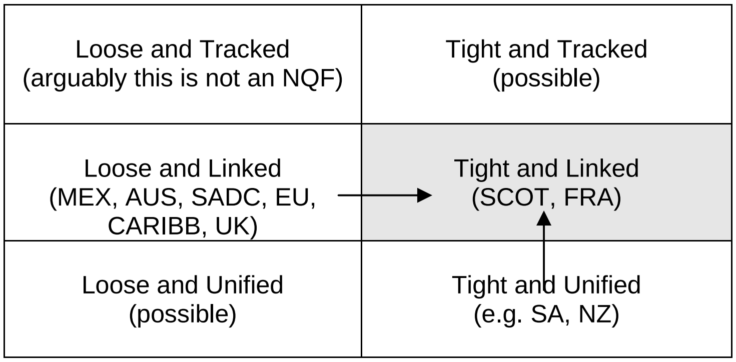
Young (2005:14) argues that:

> …the stronger the framework the harder it is likely to be to achieve agreement and for the framework to be able to include a wide diversity of learning needs.

Prescriptiveness can most probably be defined as the “Achilles heel” of unification. Governments often want to use very prescriptive frameworks to bring greater parity of esteem between education and vocational training, in effect to achieve greater unification. As Raffe (2002) pointed out in the discussion on *scope*, there is virtually no empirical evidence to show that this has worked – the opposite has rather happened: the push for unification has led to diversification. The point is that tight frameworks will naturally evolve into linked and even tracked frameworks, whereas loose frameworks may even gradually become more unified (see the next section on incrementalism).

Migration towards tight and linked NQFs

As both *scope* and *prescriptiveness* can be represented on a continuum, the following matrix is suggested (the other components of the NQF typology are not excluded, but constitute additional dimensions) as additional mechanism to describe NQF implementation:



Loose and Tracked (arguably this is not an NQF)	Tight and Tracked (possible)
Loose and Linked (MEX, AUS, SADC, EU, CARIBB, UK)	Tight and Linked (SCOT, FRA)
Loose and Unified (possible)	Tight and Unified (e.g. SA, NZ)

The following observations are made from the diagram and the preceding discussions on scope and prescriptiveness:

- No *loose and tracked* NQFs exist – as argued before, it is doubtful if such characteristics constitute and NQF at all – this combination rather represents education and training systems before any form of NQF development or implementation took place.
- *Tight and tracked* NQFs may be possible, but no current examples exist. The South African NQF may be moving to this position.
- *Loose and linked* NQFs is the most frequented category. This may be because this category is the least likely to be controversial – such an NQF may be prescriptive but will not necessarily impose integration.
- The SCQF is unique in that it is gradually moving from a linked to a more unified position (Raffe, 2003).
- *Tight and unified* is the most contentious category. The New Zealand NQF no longer fits this category and the South African NQF is precariously placed here – the reviews place it in either *the tight and linked* or *tight and tracked* category.

The last observation is the most significant. The *tight and linked* category may very well be scarcely populated at present, but there is a definite migration towards this category. This category presents the best position of compromise for governments: they are regulatory and can therefore be used to affect large-scale transformation; they are not completely tracked and do offer some progress towards greater parity of esteem between general education and vocational training. Young (2003:226) agrees that many countries are moving towards strong (tight) and comprehensive (unified or linked) NQFs and that this trend is matched by a trend of increased resistance, usually from ‘upper secondary schools and universities’. As was argued earlier, even loose frameworks have some extent of prescriptiveness, and more importantly, governments cannot use loose frameworks to achieve transformation. The proposed French NQF is a good example of a looser “classification” type of development that has gradually become tighter:

There is a definite migration towards the *tight and linked* category

> It appears that many of these [legal] developments [in France] bring the French system closer to the Anglo-Saxon notion of a national qualifications framework…There are also parallels with

> the Anglophone model in that the Law gives the State a powerful tool to organise the qualification “market” (Bouder, 2003:356).

ACTIVITY 5.1

(1) List the differences between tight and loose frameworks. Also list examples of each. A table may be useful for this exercise.

(2) Explain the different combinations of scope and prescriptiveness with examples. In this case a diagram (with two axes) may be most useful.

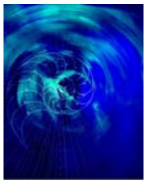
5.6 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The (proposed) regional qualifications frameworks will most probably be very loose.
2. National frameworks have to have some measure of prescriptiveness else they would be “ignored”.

ACTIVITY 5.2

Turn to Study Unit 10. Reflect on how prescriptive your NQF may be? Can it be tight in some areas and loose in others? If so, which?



STUDY UNIT 6: INCREMENTALISM OF NQFS

6.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain the different ways in which the development of NQFs are categorised and give examples within each
- discuss the two dimensions of incrementalism with examples of each
- reflect on the most appropriate approach to the development and implementation of your NQF

6.2 Overview

Incrementalism is interpreted as either the *time* elapsed since the NQF was implemented or the *extent* of the implementation. Three such interpretations are discussed below and followed by a more succinct interpretation that is included in the NQF typology.

Time-based categorisation of NQFs

The *first* interpretation is a generational *time-based* categorisation first suggested by Tuck *et al* (2004) and further applied by Samuels and Keevy (2005). This interpretation has been further developed and applied in this study guide. Three generations of NQFs are recognised:

- 1st generation – these are the very first NQFs, their development can be traced back to the early 1980s, although the first was established in New Zealand in 1989. England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Ireland and South Africa are also included in this group.
- 2nd generation – most 2nd generation NQFs are now fully implemented although their development started in the late 1990s, even early 2000s. Mexico, Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, Philippines, Namibia, Mauritius and Malaysia are included.
- 3rd generation – these are the most recently developed NQFs, most of which are still in the early stages of implementation. At least 22 countries (these include some European Member States, all the SADC Member States, most countries that constitute the Caribbean Community [CARICOM] and some former Soviet Republics) and four regions (SADC, the EU, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean) fall into this category.

1st Generation (implemented since 1995)	**2nd Generation** (implementation and development started in the late 1990s, early 2000s)	**3rd Generation** (currently under consideration)
Australia; England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Ireland; New Zealand; Scotland; South Africa (6)	Mauritius; Malaysia; Mexico; Namibia; Singapore; Trinidad and Tobago (6)	Angola; Barbados; Botswana; Brazil; Chile; China; Colombia; Caribbean (regional); Democratic Republic of Congo; EU (regional); France; Jamaica; Lesotho; Macedonia; Malawi; Mozambique; Pacific Island (regional); Philippines; SADC (regional); Slovenia; Uzbekistan; Tanzania; Turkey; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe (26)

Progress-based categorisation of NQFs

The *second* interpretation of incrementalism is one that has been extensively applied in the SADC region. The SADC TCCA (2005) developed a progress-based categorisation that is used to determine the level of NQFs in SADC Member States. Five stages are recognised:

- *Stage 0* - No progress made, no reports received.
- *Stage 1* - Background work being done, initial discussion with politicians and education and training officials, some advocacy done.
- *Stage 2* - Initial development, task team or steering committees established, conceptual papers developed, implementation plans developed.
- *Stage 3a (Implementation)* - Draft legislation formulated, some structures already in place.
- *Stage 3b (Implementation)* - Legislation formulated and passed, Authority established, Structures established, Development of procedures and processes, Development of standards, quality assurance systems and management of information system.
- *Stage 4* - Advanced implementation, System is functioning already for 5-10 years.
- *Review and reflection* - At any stage, reviews in place and evaluate progress, adjustments out in place.

The table below has been adapted from the *SADCQF Concept Paper* (SADC TCCA, 2005):

Stage 0	**Stage 1**	**Stage 2**	**Stage 3a**	**Stage 3b**	**Stage 4**
Angola, DRC	Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania	Swaziland, Zambia	Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe	Mauritius	Namibia, South Africa

An important feature of the implementation of the SADCQF is that Member States have accepted, and are encouraged, to simultaneously develop their own NQFs:

> The simultaneous development of NQFs in SADC Member States and the RQF is critical both to progress in the Member States, but also in the region. RQF development dependent on fully implemented NQFs in Member States is not seen as feasible, on the other hand, the RQF would function most effectively if all Member States were at least on Level 3b. The decision was therefore taken to actively encourage Member States, while concurrently developing the RQF. In this manner those NQFs that are still in the early stages of development can benefit from the RQF process (SADC TCCA, 2005:16).

The simultaneous development of NQFs in SADC Member States and the RQF is critical both to progress in the Member States, but also in the region

Scope-based categorisation of NQFs

The *third* interpretation is applied in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (Zuniga, 2004). It is based on the scope and coverage of NQFs and assumes that NQFs would progress from relatively separate sub-systems to a unified state (see the earlier discussion on *Scope*). Three levels are recognised:

- Level A – least coverage, sectoral and even geographically restricted with limited funding that contributes to sustainability concerns. Sectoral interest groups drive the process.
- Level B – national coverage, including different sectors of economic activity and different occupational areas. National training institutions oversee the development of the NQF.
- Level C – all social actors are involved, usually when countries have national human resource development programmes. According to Zuniga (*Ibid.*, 17) this level of NQF ‘comes closest to the creation of an NQF in its original sense’. A national authority or ministry is responsible for NQF implementation and development.

ACTIVITY 6.1

Do you agree with the categorisations discussed here?
Do you feel that your country should be “rated” differently?
What evidence would you provide to support your argument?

Collectively the three interpretations point towards two dimensions of incrementalism:

1. *rate* (progress/time) of implementation – ranging from gradual to rapid; and
2. *manner* of implementation – ranging from phased to comprehensive.

The possible permutations of the two dimensions lead to four possibilities. In many cases, a gradual implementation is combined with a phased, sector-by-sector approach; a rapid implementation is often combined with a comprehensive approach. There are however some exceptions.

The four permutations of the dimensions of incrementalism discussed below, are:

- gradual and phased;
- gradual and comprehensive;
- rapid and phased; and
- rapid and comprehensive.

6.3 Gradual and phased incrementalism

Some first generation NQFs, such as Scotland and Ireland have been implemented in a gradual and phased manner – even to the extent that the original decisions in Scotland, though eventually leading to the SCQF, never even had an NQF in mind. The Scottish system represents twenty years of reform while the Irish NQF was only established after a long initial setting up period. Second and third generation NQFs on the other hand, appear to have taken heed of the dangers of too fast implementation, in that extreme caution is being taken to ensure gradual and systematic implementation with full support from most roleplayers.

In 1996 the *Dearing Review* (lead by Sir Ron Dearing) made numerous proposals to alter the English landscape. This included a focus on the establishment of a coherent national framework of qualifications and included three distinct pathways (academic, general vocational and work-based vocational) with an incrementalist approach to reform, a single government Department and a single regulatory authority (Young, 1998:105-114).

In Latin America a similar gradual and phased approach has been noted:

> The trend in Latin America also suggest preference towards a more gradual and phased approach starting with ‘the gradual development of a classification’ (Zuniga, 2004:11) and focusing on specific sectors.

6.4 Gradual and comprehensive incrementalism

Raffe (2003 in Granville, 2004:3) explains that most NQFs that have evolved on an incremental basis were preceded by existing national systems. Granville (*Ibid.*) argues that even in such cases a significant amount of 'tweaking, adjusting and making sense retrospectively of systems that have evolved' was necessary. Referring to Deanne and Watters (2004), Granville goes as far to suggest that even the proposed EQF 'is still a contested idea since its first mooting in 1985'. These remarks are extremely important when considering the South African NQF that is barely 10 years in the making, and even more so for the proposed SADCQF that is planned to be fully implemented by 2010.

"Too soon to say" is a phrase that has become commonplace in the NQF discourse. In this case however, the lack of gradual and comprehensive examples may be well suited to such a description, or else may simply be an unobtainable ideal as the push for unification, gradual or rapid, appears to rather be creating even more diverse systems (Raffe, 2002).

6.5 Rapid and phased incrementalism

The proposed SADCQF first focuses on 'specific areas and sectors that find common ground' (Samuels and Keevy, 2005:9). The SADCQF also prefers a phased implementation, mainly because it is reliant on the development of NQFs in Member States, although the decision was taken more recently to follow a parallel approach:

> The SADCQF recognises that the principle that development should occur in a pragmatic phase-by-phase manner. Feasible practical steps should be taken to reach the outlined vision (*Ibid.*)
>
> Feasible, practical steps to attain the vision should be taken so that positive and concrete achievements can be measured as the vision is being fully implemented (SADC, 2004:8).

The SADCQF, and probably also the Caribbean RQF seem to be opting for a phased and rapid approach. The EQF on the other hand (see Granville, 2004) has been long in the making and the current more prominent developments may appear to be rapid, but are preceded by developments stating in 1985.

> Nevertheless, "second-generation NQF countries" may wish to consider the merits of some kind of incrementalist approach that concentrates initial framework-building activities in areas which will have maximum impact in relation to the intended social or educational goals such as expanding vocational education or widening access to higher education (Tuck *et al*, 2004: 7).

6.6 Rapid and comprehensive incrementalism

Amongst the first generation of NQFs, the South African example stands out as the most rapid and comprehensive of implementations:

> Countries such as South Africa, aiming for radical transformation, understandably wish to build their frameworks more quickly (Tuck *et al*, 2004: 7).

Granville (2004:3) agrees that the South African NQF was implemented at a rapid (even careless) rate of implementation:

> …five years is hardly enough time to understand a simple and restricted framework, let alone bring to fruition the comprehensive and all embracing South African model.

He further explains that the implementation of the South African NQF to date, has not been phased either:

> …in South Africa, the NQF grew from and idea first, then a system was constructed to carry the idea. The organic and pragmatic progress of growth associated with European developments was missing (*Ibid.*)

Crouch (2005:14), although speaking in the context of the educational system as a whole and not only of the NQF, suggests that South Africa's 'innovativeness and careful dedication in reforming the equity and quality issues' can be a lesson to other countries. She does however express reservations that a too rapid implementation will not be effective:

> South Africa – eight years after sowing the seeds of transformation – is only now beginning to reap the fruits, further example to the world that such profound reforms take years to design, more years to implement, and even more years to bear fruit (*Ibid.*)

New Zealand had a similar rapid and comprehensive approach:

> Instead of starting with a specific problem, the New Zealand policy makers started with a grand design; only later did they find that the grand design had to be "rolled back" (Young, 2005:24).

6.7 Conclusions

The following points have emerged from the discussion on incrementalism:

Gradual and phased implementation is not always appealing

Young (2005:25) suggests that 'governments who feel the situation of their country is one of great urgency, as in the case of South Africa' may not find the way of lest resistance (in this case the gradual and phased approach) appealing. Facing significant external and internal pressures (see Raffe, 2002) newly elected governments, such as the 1994 South African government, had no choice – the NQF had to be implemented over a short period in a most comprehensive manner possible – it did not matter if the NQF was the best idea at the time, it promised much and presented a feasible alternative to 'the new challenges of power in the era of globalisation and the aftermath of apartheid' (McGrath, 1997:81).

Granville (2003:269), referring to the Irish framework, echoes the sentiment:

> The [Irish] framework, if it is too weak, will be purely a technical mechanism; if it is too strong, it may overpower the nuanced set of varied learning experiences from which it has grown.

Rapid and comprehensive implementation has not worked

According to Young (2005) countries, such as South Africa and New Zealand that have made the most radical break from their previous systems also had the most serious difficulties. He argues that a radical break creates a vacuum – with no benchmarks to test new ideas – such radical breaks are more often than not impeded by structural constraints.

Gradual and phased implementation is least prone to power struggles

Young (2005) argues that although more incremental approaches may be less appealing to governments with a greater sense of urgency (such as South Africa), they do ‘minimise the likelihood that ideologies will intervene and as a result are more likely to avoid polarised positions’ (*Ibid.*, 25).

The SCQF is an excellent example if a gradual and phased implementation that has been very successful – to the point that it is seen as a catalyst for greater unification. Despite the normally contested nature of frameworks that purpose to unify all sectors, the Scottish process seems to be well on track:

> The goal is to include all qualifications within the [Scottish] Framework, including community-based, employment-based and professional qualifications… (Raffe, 2003:240).

ACTIVITY 6.2

Use the discussion in this section to complete the following grid (as was done in Study Unit 4). Insert examples in each “box” and also use arrows to indicate aggregation.

Gradual and Phased	Rapid and Phased
Gradual and Comprehensive	Rapid and Comprehensive

The following observations may be made from your grid:

- New Zealand and South Africa once again find themselves in the most tenuous category – one that has been plagued by contestations.
- Although gradual and phased implementation may be less appealing to new governments, they are definitely working for more established ones. This category is probably also the least prone to contestations; on the other hand it is also least likely to affect purposes of social transformation and redress.

Given enough time, all NQFs will be implemented over an extended period of time and most probably also in a phased manner. As the more radical attempts are reviewed and adjusted, it appears, at least from the examples discussed here, that a gradual and comprehensive incrementalist approach may be the most likely to succeed.

Given enough time, all NQFs will be implemented over an extended period of time and most probably also in a phased manner.

ACTIVITY 6.2

The statement in the last paragraph says that "all NQFs will be implemented over an extended period of time and most probably also in a phased manner". This is a very strong statement – do you agree? Do you want to propose an alternative?

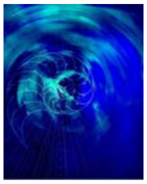
6.8 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. The Mauritius NQF is a 3rd generation NQF.
2. Angola has made no progress in developing an NQF.
3. Rapid and comprehensive incrementalism is best suited to countries that need to transform fragmented education and training systems.
4. Unrealistic expectations from governments about NQFs can lead to rushed implementations.

ACTIVITY 6.3

Turn to Study Unit 10. Take the time to reflect on the pressures for the development of your NQF. Also consider the expectations from government and the international community. How will you be able to manage all these pressures and also ensure that the NQF is developed and implemented at the best suited pace?



STUDY UNIT 7: POLICY BREADTH OF NQFS

7.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by the policy breadth of an NQF
- discuss the two dimensions of policy breadth with examples of each
- explain how the institutional logic contributes to NQF development and implementation
- explain how the intrinsic logic contributes to NQF development and implementation
- consider the policy breadth that will be needed for your NQF

7.2 Overview

Raffe (2003, in Tuck *et al*, 2004:7) describes policy breadth as:

> …the extent to which the establishment of the framework is directly and explicitly linked with other measures to influence how the framework is used.

The extent to which the establishment of the framework is directly and explicitly linked with other measures to influence how the framework is used

Raffe suggests distinguishing between *intrinsic logic* of a system and the *institutional logic* in which the system is embedded:

- **Intrinsic logic** - refers to the adequacy of the inherent *design features* of an NQF, whereas
- **Institutional logic** - refers to the extent to which external *systemic and policies*, including those of specific institutions, are related to an NQF.

7.3 Intrinsic logic

The *intrinsic logic* of an NQF arises from its design features, such as its flexible pathways and the establishment of equivalences between different qualifications. Design features also include structural arrangements such as level descriptors, assessment systems and credit requirements (see the next section on NQF architecture).

Young (2005) agrees with Raffe's interpretation of intrinsic logic, but suggests a more general interpretation that refers to conditions such as availability of assessment systems, re-training of teachers, sectoral organisations and new partnerships 'without which an NQF can never be more than a "map"' (*Ibid*., 26).

According to SAQA (2005b), international practice has shown that progressive pathways alone are not sufficient - it is argued that “communities of trust” need to be built to support NQF implementation (see also Hargreaves, 2001). The *Study Team* (DoE and DoL, 2002) gave similar advice, suggesting that even though outcomes-based systems were successful across the world, one should note that there is still ‘much to admire in another reputable qualifications tradition [such as in Denmark and Germany] which is process- or institution-based’ (*Ibid.*, 58).

They continue by explaining the strength of the approach in that qualifications are seen as ‘as an organic part of the whole education and training system’ (*Ibid.*) and stress reliance on ‘shared practice that is rooted in tradition and past experience’ (*Ibid.*). If outcomes-based NQF qualifications are not trusted and accepted in the provider and user communities they will not be used.

Young (2005:38) agrees that NQFs cannot be seen in isolation:

> Anything other than a cautious approach aware on the one hand of the limited role of an NQF in achieving change and on the other hand that NQFs can never be seen in isolation, is likely to face the kind of difficulties experienced in the implementation of the South African NQF.

Examples of frameworks with low intrinsic logic are Australia and SADC:

> Since 2002, the Australian NQF has had no levels and no authority (Keating, 2003).
>
> It is recommended that the design features of the proposed SADCQF be determined [by] allowing the proposed implementation agency to carefully, and in full consultation with key stakeholders, determine the design features (SADC TCCA, 2005:23).

Despite the initial lack of commitment to specific design features, the TCCA did recommend some design features for the SADCQF:

- *standardised terminology* to improve understanding and facilitate implementation;
- *levels* (eight or ten) and an agreed set of level descriptors to ensure common understanding and allow for benchmarking;
- *credit value* – the SADCQF will have to recognise the variety of credits awarded by Member States and develop a matrix that allows for comparability and transfer – this may evolve into a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system and importantly, also facilitate Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes;
- *common standards and procedures* that can be used to validate standards from Member States;
- *common quality assurance criteria and procedures* that can be used to monitor regional educating and training providers;
- *regional database* that includes relevant information, an on-line forum and a register of all standards in use in Member States as

> well as a register of regional standards approved and registered throughout the SADC region.

The proposed SADCQF is a good example of a framework that initially has a low intrinsic logic, but that may increase as implementation commences.

An example of an NQF with high intrinsic logic is found in South Africa. The South African NQF is premised on principles (SAQA, 2000:5) that all, in some way or another, point towards the need for a variety of intrinsic components. Examples include vertical and horisontal progression routes, credit transfer, articulation arrangements and equivalencies (CONOCER, 1999). Namibia, New Zealand, Mauritius and Lesotho can all be regarded as NQFs with high intrinsic logic.

According to Samuels *et al* (2005) there are many examples in the South African NQF where intrinsic logic (design features of an NQF that are associated with compliance) is becoming institutional logic (the extent to which the social justice issues and quality, etc, are becoming embedded in practice). The point to be made is that high intrinsic logic without some measure of institutional logic, does not constitute adequate policy breadth: both dimensions are required for effective NQF implementation, even more so with tight frameworks that purpose to achieve redress and social transformation.

ACTIVITY 7.1

Discuss the communities of trust that already exist in your context. Are more needed? How can this be achieved?

7.4 Institutional logic

According to Tuck *et al* (2004) institutional logic comprises of the:

> …opportunities, incentives and constraints arising from such factors as the policies of educational institutions (in their roles as providers and selectors), funding and regulatory requirements, timetabling and resource constraints, the relative status of different fields of study and the influence of the labour market and the social structure.

A framework may be ineffective if it is not complemented by measures to reform the surrounding institutional logic

Bouder (2003) agrees with Raffe (1992) that NQFs cannot be put in place just for their own sake, 'as a self-sustaining mechanism relatively removed from real aspirations of intended outcomes' (Bouder, 2003:347). She also agrees with Young (2001) that a NQF that 'neglects the institutional logic within which it is implemented has little or no chance of playing a real role in the social organisations and acceptance of qualifications' (*Ibid.*, 348).

Tuck *et al* (2004) argue that a framework may be ineffective if it is not complemented by measures to reform the surrounding institutional logic – these could include local institutional agreements to promote credit transfer (cf. Heyns, 2005) or the encouragement of employers to reflect credit values in their selection processes. Other measures include the development of communities of trust and increased parity of esteem (Young, 2003 in Heyns, 2005). On all counts the importance of high, rather than low, institutional logic is emphasised.

According to Zuniga (2004:76) the connection between ‘local and or sectoral efforts and national training policies’ can be a critical weak point that contributes to a lack of coordination. Zuniga further emphasises that significant effort is needed to coordinate various initiatives (such as funding and public and private work-related) to ensure synergy on a national level.

Legislation and other regulatory requirements also have a significant influence on intrinsic logic. As before, a wide range of examples exist: in Australia the AQF has ‘no legislative base’ (Keating, 2003:278); in comparison, South Africa has an extensive array of acts and regulations that have lead to the establishment of a qualifications authority (SAQA Act, No. 58 of 1995), quality assurance bodies (ETQA Regulations [SA, 1998a]; Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997; GENFETQA Act, No. 58 of 2001), NSBs and SGBs (NSB Regulations [SA, 1998b]). Many counties in the process of implementing 3rd generation NQFs are at various stages of developing legislation, examples include: Lesotho (Lesotho, 2004), Malaysia and Trinidad and Tobago (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

Another prominent aspect of institutional logic is the degree to which NQFs contribute to, and articulate with other national strategies and developments. In South African a concerted effort has been made to determine the NQF’s contribution (SAQA, 2005b) to the Human Resource Development Strategy and the National Skills Development Strategy. The results have shown that:

> There is significant evidence that the NQF has made a positive contribution to the achievement of national strategies (*Ibid.*, 93).
>
> The government intends the NQF to make a major impact…but the goals themselves – access, mobility, progression, quality, redress and development – are wider and deeper than the NQF. They describe the major part of the permanent combined education and training agendas of the Ministries of Education and Labour, and require a range of other actions, including appropriate laws and policies, institutions, budgetary allocations, infrastructure development, professional development for teachers and trainers, and provision of learning resource materials (DoE and DoL, 2002:65).

According to SAQA (2005:47) there is sufficient evidence ‘from the Irish and Scottish experiences that a single strategy is not enough to lead to deep change’. NQF implementation, particularly where the NQF is tight, prescriptive and purposes to achieve social transformation necessitates high institutional logic.

A single strategy is not enough to lead to deep change

Examples of NQFs with *low* institutional logic are sub-Saharan countries and SADC:

> The sub-Saharan countries …are attempting to introduce an NQF with relatively low levels of institutional provision (Young, 2005:16).

> The SADCQF is remarkably quiet about the linkages of the RQF with other areas of the education and training system and how it fits into the entire process. More work is certainly required to see the RQF as part of other strategies for change (Samuels and Keevy, 2005:10).

Examples of NQFs with *high* institutional logic are Singapore and the Caribbean:

> Singapore has a high level of institutional provision for both general and vocational education, the NQF is being introduced to further coordinate this provision and to link it to the accreditation of work based learning (Young, 2005:16).

> [Caribbean NQF developments] define the links and connections between different levels of training and the ways of entering, re-entering and recognising paths for progress in educational itineraries, and areas and levels of competency (Zuniga, 2004:13).

ACTIVITY 7.2

Discuss the range of sectoral efforts and national policies that exist in your country. Also try to show how these developments will support the development of your NQF. You may need to consider which additional policies need to be developed.

7.5 Conclusions

The following points have emerged from the discussion on policy breadth:

Lack of institutional logic can lead to unrealistic expectations

In South Africa the expectations of what the NQF could achieve was unrealistic, particularly when seen as distinct from the Human Resource Development and the National Skills Development Strategies (Tuck *et al*, 2004). The sentiment is further supported by SAQA (2005b) and earlier in the Study Team Report (DoE and DoL, 2002:66):

> Given its origins and scope, many South Africans have justifiably high expectations of the NQF in the transformation of education and training. However, the NQF was never intended to achieve transformation on its own and could not do so.

Widespread and unrealistic expectations of what the NQF could achieve, often seen in isolation from the broader policy context, soon resulted in disillusionment and criticism:

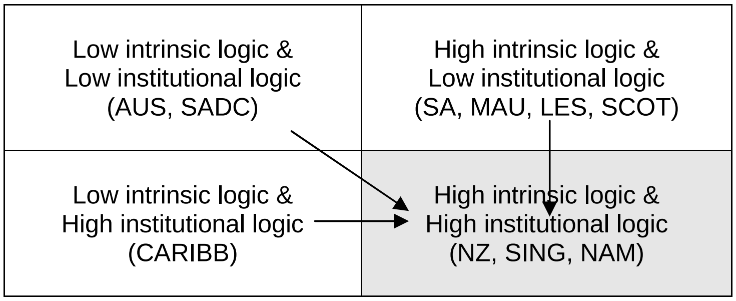
> It has become quite clear, according to the Impact Study that the NQF cannot by itself deliver on its stated objectives. Factors both within and outside South Africa militate against these changes (Republic of Seychelles, 2004:22).
>
> …there are widespread and unrealistic expectations of what an NQF can achieve in isolation from other policies and initiatives… the 'real' objectives of the NQF are different from its explicit objectives. It could be argued that the means of resolution of both issues is the same: that the government must make explicit what the NQF is expected to achieve and the purposes for which it will be used. A democratically-elected government is entitled to use qualifications for the purpose of accountability if it so chooses. However, it should make transparent what these purposes are and open up the possibility of debate on potential conflict between particular purposes. Also, the NQF must be seen as an element (albeit a central one) of a wider plan for the transformation of education and training. Such a plan must address issues of infrastructure and professional development (SAQA, 2004:29).

Combination of high intrinsic logic and high institutional logic is preferable

Tuck *et al* (2004:10) argue that it is necessary to combine Raffe's categories, whilst also having strong leadership and resourcing:

> …combine intrinsic and institutional logics while not subordinating social and educational goals to the needs of specific institutional interest groups.

As before, a grid (matrix) offers an accessible presentation for the policy breadth of NQFs:



Low intrinsic logic & Low institutional logic (AUS, SADC)	High intrinsic logic & Low institutional logic (SA, MAU, LES, SCOT)
Low intrinsic logic & High institutional logic (CARIBB)	High intrinsic logic & High institutional logic (NZ, SING, NAM)

ACTIVITY 7.3

Try to make at least three observations from the grid above.

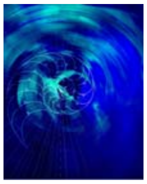
7.6 Test yourself

Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. All government policies should be aligned to NQF legislation.
2. NQFs with low institutional logic are ineffective.
3. Intrinsic logic can increase as an NQF develops.
4. The expectations of what NQFs can achieve are often unrealistic and idealistic.
5. Leadership and resourcing are important to the effective development and implementation of an NQF.
6. The agendas of some interest groups need to dominate the interests of others.

ACTIVITY 7.4

Continue with the development of Study Unit 10 by discussing the envisaged policy breadth of your NQF.



STUDY UNIT 8: ARCHITECTURE OF NQFS

8.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- list and describe the various architectural components that make up an NQF
- discuss the different definitions of the various architectural components
- consider which “types” of qualifications can be included on an NQF
- explain outcomes-based education and training and how it fits into NQF development
- explain the credit systems within the context of NQFs
- discuss the role of a qualifications register in an NQF system
- discuss the different levels, bands and pathways associated with NQFs
- describe quality assurance associated with NQFs
- describe standards setting associated with NQFs
- discuss the different way in which NQFs organise knowledge
- discuss the various architectural components of your NQF

8.2 Overview

NQF architecture is understood to be the structural arrangements that make up the various components of an NQF.

The difference between NQF architecture and the other typological components is best explained by reverting back to an earlier “framework” interpretation of an NQF (see Study Unit 1) by Mavimbela (2001) and Cosser (2001). According to them the very basic understanding of an NQF is that of a “constructional system” made up of, *inter alia*, various (non-physical) levels that form a grid upon which qualifications are pinned. Another way of explaining the architecture is to take the NQF as complex social construct (also from Cosser, 2001) and removing from this the underlying philosophies, overt purposes, scope, prescriptiveness, incrementalism and policy breadth – i.e. the construction only.

As noted before, this is not a comparative study, although examples outside South Africa do make it easier to understand the position of the South African NQF. For this reason, the NQF architecture of other NQFs are included in the discussion below, although as before, these are only summarised – despite the fact that significant amounts of relevant data was available to the author, the inclusion of a more detailed architectural overview of other NQFs would be misplaced in a study that attempts to offer a more in-depth critique of the development and implementation of the South African NQF.

The following NQF architectural components are discussed in this section:

- **Qualifications** – the types, classes and registration requirements, as they are required to be aligned to NQF objectives and principles.
- **Outcomes-based education and training** (OBET) – the “reinvention” of OBET for the NQF.
- **Credit requirements and accumulation** – the differences and similarities between NQFs and Credit and Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) systems.
- **Qualifications register** – the databases that contain the qualifications, learner information, etc. that all related to the NQF.
- **Bands, levels and pathways** – including debates about level descriptors, the “quicksilver” dimension of equivalence and broad comparability.
- **Assessment** – an NQF as a fair, credible and non-exclusionary assessment system.
- **Quality assurance** – an NQF as a quality assurance system.
- **Standards setting** – the specifying of end results and competencies and not the development of curricula.
- **Organising fields** – the way in which the NQF categorises, organises and accepts knowledge.

8.3 Qualifications

SAQA (2000c:8) defines a qualification as:

> …a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose or purposes, including applied competence and a basis for further learning.

According to the *NSB Regulations* (SA, 1998b) such a qualification may lead to a total of 120 or more credits on the NQF. Unit standard, on the other hand, may lead to any amount of credits (although usually less than 120) and is defined as (*Ibid.*):

> …registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria, describing the quality of the expected performance.
>
> Unit standards are thus not qualifications and will rarely or never meet all the competencies described in the set of level descriptor statements at a particular NQF level. The breadth and depth of learning provided by particular unit standards must be enough however, to allow their registration at a particular level of the framework (SAQA, 2001b:12).

The NSB Regulations prescribe three *types* of qualifications:

a. National Certificate at levels 1 to 8 where it has 120 (one hundred and twenty) or more credits with 72 (seventy-two) credits at or above the level at which the certificate is registered.
b. National Diploma where it has a minimum of 240 (two hundred and forty) credits, of which at least 72 (seventy-two) credits shall be at level 5 or above.
c. National First Degree where it has a minimum of 360 (three hundred and sixty) credits of which at least 72 (seventy-two) credits shall be at level 6 or above.

Samuels and Keevy (2005a:3) summarise the two *classes* of qualifications on the NQF as follows:

> *Unit standard-based qualifications*: Qualifications that are made up of a specific grouping of unit standards so that specific rules of combination for a qualification are adhered to – this refers mainly to the fundamental, core and elective components of the qualification. These qualifications also have their own sets of outcomes and assessment criteria, but are characterised by the matrix of unit standards that are attached to them.
>
> *Non-unit standard-based qualifications*: These are qualifications that specify only the exit level outcomes and assessment criteria…and are not made up of distinct unit standards. These qualifications are described by broad exit level outcomes and assessment criteria to ensure that a planned combination of learning outcomes is presented.

In order for a qualification to be registered on the South African NQF it needs to be 'relevant, up to date and acceptable to major stakeholder and user groups' (SAQA, 2000c:22). Furthermore, NSBs (and to some extent SGBs) ensure that qualifications 'meet the NQF's transformational objectives of access, portability, and articulation' (*Ibid*.). In addition to these requirements, qualifications also have to meet specific technical requirements such as formatting to improve comparability, articulation and capturing on the national register of qualifications (SAQA, 2000e). These registration requirements are enforced through the NSB Regulations (SA, 1998b).

Once a qualification is registered on the NQF it is placed in the public domain and is accessible to all stakeholders, downloadable from the SAQA website. This applies to all qualifications registered on the NQF, independent of how and where they were developed and is done to discourage exclusionary practices:

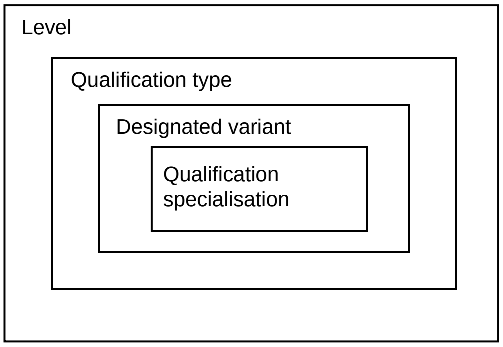
> Through the requirement for articulation in nationally-registered qualifications and standards, the NQF has challenged directly what is perceived to be one of the most problematic social uses of qualifications, i.e. the practice of exclusion (SAQA, 2000d:9).

As is happening in Ireland (NQAI, 2003) and elsewhere, professional qualifications, or rather the lack of such a type of qualification is a current topic of debate. In South Africa there is common understanding that *professional qualifications* are 'those qualifications that are required by a particular professional/awarding body as partial prerequisite to obtain a professional status' whereas *professional designation* is generally understood as the 'license to practice' in a particular field or sector. Professional designation is the advanced professional standing of an individual based on recognition from a particular professional/awarding body' (Keevy, 2005:12, also see Morrow, 2005).

Blackmur (2003) raises an important point in his 2003 *Critique of the Concept of an NQF* wherein he states that 'NQFs operate in an environment in which nomenclature is virtually meaningless' (*Ibid.*, 279). That is despite the fact that the educational reforms of the 1990s intended to do exactly the opposite. Blackmur argues that the inclusion of "non-conforming" (or "historical" as discussed above) qualifications, mainly due to political and other circumstances, within NQF classification structures by many qualifications authorities (also see Samuels and Keevy, 2005) has led to different qualifications being assigned to the same NQF level, this in turn has led to inaccurate and unreliable information being conveyed to reliant labour markets.

Since the 2001 release of the CHE's draft *New Academic Policy* (CHE, 2001) there has been consensus that a nested approach to qualification specialisation would be followed in South Africa:

> …the description of learning [moves] from the general and generic to the specialised and specific, with the more specific standards or qualifications always meeting the requirements of the more generic within which they are nested or framed (CHE, 2001:42).



In Lesotho qualification nomenclature supports the comparability and portability of qualifications, the easy understanding of the outcomes of qualifications, and regional and international recognition of qualifications (Lesotho, 2004:19).

In Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualifications (TTNVQs) are based on national occupational standards and developed in response to the needs of industry and the global market. TTNVQs are ideally combined with more general academic Caribbean qualifications. A qualification is defined as:

> A certificate for a particular achievement that specifies the awarding body, the type of qualification and its title (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

As from 2001, all Scottish qualifications have been included on the SCQF. Qualifications are described in terms of their level and volume (credit value) where:

> …the volume of the outcome is estimated by the amount of time required by the "average" learner, at a particular level, to achieve the outcomes (SCQF, 2003:4).

Although the New Zealand quality assurance are described as systemic and non-prescriptive, qualification developers must 'provide evidence that their products… meet publicly documented criteria' (Richardson, 1999:4).

ACTIVITY 8.1

(1) Reflect on the different ways in which qualifications are defined in the various NQFs. You may want to attempt a definition that is best suited to your context.

(2) List the different "types" of qualifications that can be included on an NQF.

8.4 Outcomes-based education and training

Arguably a discussion on outcomes-based education and training (OBET) or an outcomes-based philosophy would be better placed in the earlier section on "Guiding philosophies" of NQFs – i.e. the underlying thinking that influences (usually covertly) the development and implementation of an NQF. The description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes has however become such an integral part of NQF development that it cannot be considered as a covert influence anymore – the South African NQF is a case in point:

> The [South African] NQF with its commitment to outcomes-based education and training is the means that South Africa has chosen to bring about systemic change in the nature of the education and training system (SAQA, 2000b:7).

Isaacs (2001) argues that the shift to OBET was not fully debated in the early stages of NQF implementation, and as a result, meant that OBET became 'caricatured with often narrow, technicist and behaviorist curriculum reform initiatives' (*Ibid.*, 128). For Isaacs OBET was all about systemic change:

> Our OBET is primarily about systemic change, and we have reinvented OBET for our purposes in an holistic and educationally sound manner (*Ibid.*).

Isaacs continues his argument by explaining that the debate has been further confused with schools reform initiatives, such as Curriculum 2005, in that the NQF is regarded as synonymous when it should not be:

> Such confusion [between OBET and Curriculum 2005] bedevils systemic change (*Ibid.*).

More recently, in the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005b) a concerted effort was made to distinguish between outcomes-based education (OBE) as associated with Curriculum 2005 and an outcomes-based approach. It was however found that the terms are still conflated:

> …the schooling sector, in particular, conflated the Department of Education's outcomes-based education (OBE), with the NQF's outcomes-based approach. It is recommended that targeted research in undertaken in this area, specifically in terms of the conceptual differences and practice between OBE in schools and an outcomes-based approach as understood as a key underpinning principle of the NQF (*Ibid*., 32).

SAQA (2000b) lists a number of imperatives that resulted in the South African NQF being based on outcomes:

Historical imperative

Global trends and discussions

International comparability

The first is a *historical imperative*. The fragmented South African society in 1994 was partly due to the fact that 'where the qualification was obtained was more important that what qualifying students actually new and could do' (*Ibid.*, 6). In addition to this problem of a lack of access (and also parity of esteem between institutions), portability was limited. Institutions could arbitrarily decide to recognise or refuse qualifications achieved at other institutions. This inappropriate social use of qualifications required a focus on what learners know and can do – i.e. the learning outcomes that the learner can demonstrate.

The second imperative for using outcomes emerged from *global trends and discussions*. As argued by Raffe (2002), external pressures, such as globalisation, have resulted in move towards more unified and integrated systems, albeit less than successful. The South African NQF was also affected - clearly articulated outcomes of learning achievements was seen as a viable manner in which to inculcate understandings of lifelong learning, the elimination of artificial hierarchies and new knowledge development. Here Kraak (1998) argues that by 1998, the education and training transformation process had become sidetracked, mainly to the dominance of OBET:

> The education and training reform has lost sight of its original purpose in seeking to create a unified and integrated system which would consciously address social inequalities…(*Ibid*., 32).

A third imperative is *international comparability.* The international trend towards 'describing qualifications in terms of achieved learning outcomes' (*Ibid.*, 7) and the resulting need for articulation between South African and international qualifications was seen to be facilitated by using an outcomes-based approach.

SAQA (2001b) observes that few qualification frameworks are part of OBET systems. They argue that this places limitations on the extent to which qualifications can be pegged on higher education levels. This if further complicated by a lack of reliance on level descriptors 'that describe in a general way what the outcomes are that one would expect' (*Ibid*., 13).

> Outcomes-based education means clearly focusing and organising everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experience (Spady, 1994 in SAQA, 2000d:11),

The NQF's alignment with outcomes-based education is at the systems organisation level (SAQA, 2000d) and the combination is therefore most appropriate to effecting systemic change:

> ….outcomes-based education is primarily about systemic change [as advocated by Spady, 1994] and not curriculum change. The NQF then in its commitment to a system of education and training that is organised around the notion of learning outcomes, is about systemic change (*Ibid*., 11).
>
> A key feature of OBET is that it is aligned with the goals of the NQF and posits mechanisms for structuring learning programmes in the form of unit standards…and course credits (Kraak, 1998:21).

As many others, Mehl (1997) questioned whether the decision to premise the NQF on OBET was an attempt at a "quick fix". This thinking was supported by McGrath's concern, also in 1997, that government chose the NQF as vehicle of transformation simply because there was no feasible alternative. Mehl is however of the opinion that this was *not* the case with OBET:

> Given the enormity of South Africa's human resource development problems, it would be seductive for policy makers to attempt some short-term remediation. It is to their credit that it does not appear as if this is the intention with the introduction of OBET (*Ibid.*, 3).

Mehl further associates OBET with learner-centeredness, accountability and a broader definition of a learning institution if a nation of lifelong learners are to be created:

> A complete break with the past is called for. OBET can well be the vehicle to achieve this (*Ibid*., 6).

SAQA raises similar concerns, most particularly around the expectations of OBET and RPL:

> The danger that threatens the system is that outcomes-based education is perceived as the panacea for all ills in the South African education and training system. This is clearly not the case (SAQA, 2000d:13).

The danger that threatens the system is that outcomes-based education is perceived as the panacea for all ills

> RPL in South Africa has, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, a very specific agenda. RPL is meant to support *transformation* of the education and training system of the country (SAQA, 2002b:11, emphasis in original).

Along with South Africa, the NZQF is ‘possibly the most comprehensive in the world’ (Philips, 2003:289). Philips argues that this is mainly due to the inclusion of an outcomes-based approach in both NQFs.

The SCQF is an “outcomes-based” framework (Raffe, 2003).

For each qualification there must be statement of learning outcomes, which include the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes as well as the combined purpose of the qualification (Lesotho, 2004).

The Irish framework is explicitly based on a ‘learning-outcomes model’ that is ‘agnostic on learning processes, curriculum specifications and teaching and learning methodologies’ (Granville, 2003:267). Granville argues that although this approach has been internationally accepted in the vocational sector, it ‘remains deeply alien’ (*Ibid.*) to educationalists, resulting in fears of utilitarianism, functionalism and reductionism.

ACTIVITY 8.2

(1) Is you education and training system based on OBET?

(2) Will all future training be outcomes-based?

(3) What are the benefits (and disadvantages) of using an outcomes-based system?

8.5 Credit requirements and accumulation

Most, if not all, NQFs, use a system of quantifying the time taken to complete a qualification on a certain level of difficulty in a manner that makes it possible to better describe the qualification, but also to enable greater comparability and transferability of partial of complete fulfilment of the requirements of the particular qualification. Although these credits are determined in different manners in different countries, there is general consensus that the quantification is necessary.

NQFs use a system of quantifying the time taken to complete a qualification on a certain level of difficulty

In South Africa the time taken to complete a qualification (including the time spent during assessment, preparation, tuition and even in the workplace) is defined as “notional hours” that are directly linked to a number of credits:

> SAQA uses a credit system based on the idea that one credit equals ten notional hours of learning, motivated in context in each case (SAQA, 2000c:9).

The credits are also linked to different types of knowledge:

> Credits are obtained for the achievement of fundamental (basic knowledge and skills to master the outcomes of the qualification), core (the compulsory learning relevant to the outcomes), and elective (choice of credits that may or may not relate directly to the purpose of the qualification) knowledge that is integral to all qualifications that are recorded on the framework (Seychelles, 2004:15).

Young (2005) suggests that, during 2000, governments' interest in NQFs took a variety of forms, most significantly focusing on credit accumulation and transfer (CAT). The credit system associated with the South African NQF differs from the system used by in the SCQF in that:

> [CAT] is the process whereby a learner's achievements are recognised and contribute to further learning even if the learner does not achieve a qualification (DoE, 2004:10).

Naude *et al* (2005) argue, that in the international context, CAT systems are generally *not* well supported and are only at the early stages of implementation. According to them, CAT schemes exist, or are being developed, mainly in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (European Credit Transfer System [ECTS]), Scotland (SCOTCATS) and Ireland (NICATS).

Kraak (1998) identifies three key characteristics of CAT schemes:

- facilitate movement across all divisions within education and training;
- provide a flexible framework that allows maximum choice, exploration, pacing and specialisation – opening up the curriculum to students who would not have been in formal learning; and
- allows for the development of new forms of knowledge which reflect new social developments that pose new possibilities for relating the vocational and academic in the curriculum.

Trowler (1998) associates the CAT system in the UK with two types of managerialism: hard managerialism that 'seeks to rationalise and reshape higher education making fundamental changes to it…'(Ibid., 31) and soft managerialism that 'sees the framework as providing a solution for the economic crisis in higher education…a solution with limited or no ill-effects and limited impact on power and the role of the academic community' (*Ibid.*).

Blackmur (2004) argues that the location of different size qualifications on the same levels (one qualification can be associated with a number of outcomes at a certain level, while another qualification may be associated with fewer outcomes at the same level) makes it very difficult to determine 'how long it took a nominated individual to achieve or demonstrate the relevant outcomes' (*Ibid.*, 274) – in brief, there is no direct correlation between the number of credits and the time taken to achieve the qualification.

Another serious objection raised by Blackmur is the lack of correlation between credits and modes of delivery that also limit the international comparability of qualifications:

> The proposition that credits are somehow meaningfully independent of modes of delivery or assessment is, at the very least, highly contentious. Credit values ought, in fact, to be intimately related to both the mode of delivery and assessment (*Ibid*.).

In contrast to Blackmur's argument for greater alignment between credits and time taken to complete a qualification, SAQA has rather argued for a more flexible approach, one in which the time taken to complete a qualification becomes less important than the learner's ability to demonstrate competence, regardless of the time taken (SAQA, 2002b).

The SCQF is probably the best example of a NQF that is also a CAT scheme. Credits on the SCQF represent ten notional hours of learning and qualifications 'provide the foundations of a learning and credit transfer framework' (SCQF, 2003:1) that is implemented throughout Scotland.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is seen to be the basis for the establishment of a common frame of reference to be overseen by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in co-operation with the higher education community (DoE and DoL, 2002:41).

The soon to be established LQF proposes that accredit value be attached to each qualification (defined as 'the average amount of learning and assessment time that would be required for one to gain a qualification or attain skills and knowledge associated with a trainings standard and is measured in terms of "notional hours"' (Lesotho, 2004:19) where ten notional hours is equivalent to one credit.

The NZQA's credit points are based on notional hours of learning and different to the Scottish system, but similar to the South African one, includes the time spent on assignments and in assessment (Blackmur, 2003). Since 2003 the NQAI has been involved in developing policies and guidelines for a national approach to credit transfer (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

ACTIVITY 8.3

(1) Discuss the different ways in which the time taken to complete a qualification at a specific level of complexity can be measured.

(2) List the key characteristics of a CAT system.

(3) Are all NQFs CAT systems? If not, how do they differ?

8.6 Qualifications register

NQFs are mirrored in large national qualifications registers

Without exception, NQFs are mirrored in large national qualifications registers, such as the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) in South Africa:

> The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) is an electronic management information system to facilitate the management of the National Qualifications Framework and enable the South African Qualifications Authority to report accurately on most aspects of the education and training system of South Africa (www.saqa.org.za, accessed 18 April 2005).

These databases, typically, contain (Keevy, 2003b):

- all qualifications and unit standards registered on the NQF;
- individual records of learners who achieve the outcomes of standards and qualifications registered on the NQF;
- learner achievements;
- details of quality assurance bodies; and
- details of accredited providers, assessors and moderators.

The NLRD was developed with substantial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The complexity and challenges of the task, however, resulted in insufficient skills transfer to SAQA staff, which led to concerns of sustainability, particularly during the extended review period:

> An area of great concern is SAQA's ability to maintain and continue the development of the NLRD to meet new and changing requirements (EU, 2002:52).

In order for the national register to be continually updated, education and training providers, and more importantly, ETQAs need to develop and maintain compatible databases. SAQA (2001c) requires ETQAs to maintain databases that have the capacity to store:

- NQF standards and qualifications
- Related NSB information (including moderation and accreditation criteria)
- Constituent assessors and moderating bodies
- Constituent providers
- Learner records (including details of all certificates awarded to learners on achievement of NQF standards or qualifications)

To ensure that these information systems are "acceptable" they have to meet the criteria of: flexibility in combining methods and tools; coherence in reporting through a common format; and management of information (including security of information and rights to privacy) (SAQA, 2001c:35).

The SADCQF *Concept Paper* (TCCA, 2005) explicitly details the need for a SADCQF database linked to a well-managed website. This should also include (*Ibid*., 23):

- standardised corrigible lexicon of official or approved terminology;
- information about all key education and training structures and institutions, standards authorities, quality assurance systems, accreditation agencies, and recognition systems in the region; and
- analytical data relating to commonalities and differences of qualifications in the region.

According to the *Concept Paper* there will also be a need for a register of standards in general use within the region, 'even if only in one member country (whether international, approved, historical)' (*Ibid.*, 24). It is clear that the regional database will be a pivotal part of the development and implementation of the SADCQF.

ACTIVITY 8.4

(1) List the various elements of a national qualifications register.

(2) Briefly discuss the resources that need to be put in place to develop and maintain a national qualifications register.

8.7 Levels, bands and pathways

The South African NQF consists of eight levels, three bands (GET, FET and HET), and one unified pathway.

NQF level	Band	Pathway
8 7 6 5	HET	SINGLE UNIFIED SYSTEM
4 3 2	FET	
1	GET	

In contrast to most other NQFs, the South African NQF (at least at present) makes no distinction between different pathways. It does however appear certain that this position will change as the tight and unified position has been prone to continual contestations.

In the South African context level descriptor means:

> …that statement describing a particular level of the eight levels of the National Qualifications Framework (SA, 1998b).

The level descriptors also link directly to the qualification types:

> …the construction of the frameworks reflect a one-to-one relationship between a qualification type and the level on the framework. Thus there is one set of descriptors (and one level of the framework) for each qualification type. This means that the level descriptors (where they exist) are actually qualifications descriptors (SAQA, 2001b:19).

A single set of level descriptors describes the level of competency required on each of the eight levels. The development of the level descriptors has not been without controversy. An initial discussion document was released by SAQA (2000f), after which a first set was developed (as required in the SAQA Act and NSB Regulations) (SAQA, 2001b) by a joint SAQA, SAUVCA and the CHE task team. These were also published in the CHE's Draft New Academic Policy (CHE, 2001). At present, Levels 1 to 4 have been gazetted while the remaining levels still have to be finalised.

Mehl's (2004:17) advice that the development of level descriptors should be approached with caution is important in this regard:

> Level Descriptor definition is not an exact science. And thus, while it is possible to define a Level with as many outcomes as you like, it will never be sufficient. It is therefore probably better to err on the side of brevity.

Level Descriptor definition is not an exact science.

Blackmur (2004) is critical of the notion that placing qualifications on the same level implies that they are equivalent. He argues that the Scottish acceptance of "broadly comparable" 'is the best that can be hoped for' (*Ibid.*, 272). For Blackmur an NQF based on levels (and therefore also level descriptors) imposes serious limitations on the NQF, most notably the fact that it becomes 'logically possible to assign qualifications that have nothing in common to the same level' (*Ibid*., 272) and therefore also less able to offer the labour market useful information.

> The level descriptors will be brief and very broad. They simply indicate a level of complexity in a cross-curricular way (DoE, 1996:38).

Although the three bands of the NQF have never been contested, the unified pathway has been a major topic for debate. This is because the pathway, or rather pathways, reflects the extent to the NQF is unified, linked or tracked (Raffe, 2002). Rejection of the single pathway has symbolised the opposition by many stakeholders to the integrated approach embedded in the SAQA Act's (SA, 1995) interpretation of the NQF.

The SCQF has 12 levels and is made up of three distinct and linked tracks (there is however a strong, although gradual and phased, drive towards a unified framework) based on origin of development: SQA, Higher Education providers and the vocational sector. Importantly, various level-related aspects are currently under debate, such as the correspondence between Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) levels and SCQF levels (Raffe, 2003).

The proposed LQF will have 10 levels and a single set of level descriptors (Lesotho, 2004). Reference is made to the coordination (and stronger linkages) between three “worlds” or pathways: schooling, higher education and TVET.

The Philipppines’ TVET qualification framework has four certificate levels and is modular in structure (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

ACTIVITY 8.5

(1) Explain the differences between levels, bands and pathways on an NQF.

(2) Explain what is meant by level descriptors and reflect on the challenges in developing such descriptors.

(3) How necessary is it that your NQF’s levels, bands and pathways are similar to those used in your neighbouring countries, and even more so to those included in the proposed SADCQF?

8.8 Assessment procedures

According to SAQA (2002b:5), assessment is:

> …the process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether learners have demonstrated specific outcomes in unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the NQF.

The principles related to assessment in the South African context are: integration (also see SAQA, 2005k and SAQA, 2000c), recognition of achievements, access, progression, portability and articulation, legitimacy and credibility, flexibility, guidance of learners (SAQA, 2000:17) and RPL (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, RPL is known as Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL]):

> Recognition of prior learning is giving credit to what learners already know and can do regardless of whether learning was achieved formally, informally or non-formally (SAQA, 2001d:44).

Just as the NQF itself, RPL implementation is also prone to contestations:

> …an enabling environment demonstrating commitment to RPL is essential. Unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict (SAQA, 2002b:18).

According to SAQA (2000) the registration of assessors and the establishment of moderation systems is a critical element of the quality management of NQF processes:

> The register of assessors is a means of ensuring that there is a pool of assessors that are deemed to have the appropriate experience and expertise to assess according to principles and to the assessment requirements of the unit standard (SAQA, 2000c:19).

The resistance from some stakeholders, mostly from the higher education sector, to register assessors (and therefore also to comply with the requirements therefore [SAQA, 2001e]) became an important feature of NQF implementation, to the extent that the *Study Team* (DoE and DoL, 2002) made numerous recommendations around the use of registered assessors, including that assessors employed by accredited providers do not have to register.

An important feature of NQF-related assessment was the focus on inclusivity

An important feature of NQF-related assessment was the focus on inclusivity:

> A critical shift in the thinking behind the NQF in South Africa is the recognition that assessment in education should not aim to select and sort learners with a view to restrict progression, but that the assessment should aim to include a much larger proportion in learning (Oberholzer, 1994:4).

Oberholzer (1994) also noted the practical difficulties in establishing credible assessment procedures that would meet the needs of learners going to school for the first time at the normal age, or at the age of twelve of thirteen, or even adults who had no access to formal education. Although she says that '[s]ome would argue that it is simply not possible and nor is it desirable' (*Ibid.*, 4) she is of the opinion that 'a way must be found' to do so, she suggests that an NQF could be such a vehicle:

> At this time I do not see many possibilities for bringing some sense and order to the mess and chaos that faces education reform and reconstruction in South Africa. One possibility is the establishment of an NQF (*Ibid.*, 5).

Oberholzer (1994b:28) makes another important point in that teachers were not equipped to deal with the radical shift in assessment practices associated with the NQF. This is supported by the results from the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005).

Muller (2004) is of the opinion that assessment and qualifications, as a 'compound instrument regulating learner movement through the education system' (*Ibid*., 221) is more often than not bitterly contested. According to Muller, there are two axes of contestation: *Dualists and monists* - An individualising purpose: Between those who distinguish between different modes of knowledge, learning and qualification (dualists) and those who don't (monists); *Decentralisers and centralisers* - An aggregating purpose: Between those for whom assessment for pedagogic purposes is central (centralisers) and for those whom assessment is a signalling system for systemic performance is primary (decentralisers).

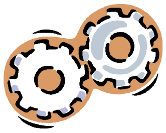
Umalusi raises the concern that NQF assessments are so customised that they are difficult to quality assure:

> The NQF has introduced an approach of quality assurance where assessments are customised to programmes and learning sites. This approach contextualises quality in local needs and priorities and has a more diversified model of trust regarding learning outcomes. This approach, whilst valid, has the inherent weaknesses of widely varying standards as well as limited and uncertain progression routes to higher education (Umalusi, 2004:5).

In Zambia the NQF is seen as a vital part of a fair assessment system:

> An NQF is believed to provide a fair assessment system, which measures achievements against agreed national standards and a quality assurance system. In the absence of the [Zambian] NQF, the quality of assessment and certification may be questionable (Kazonga, 2003:5).

ACTIVITY 8.6



(1) Define what is meant by assessment in the context of an NQF.

(2) To what extent do you need to consider RPL when developing an NQF in your country?

(3) How will you ensure that assessments are fair, valid and reliable?

(4) What assessment systems are already in place in your country? Will you include national examinations? What about schooling?

8.9 Quality assurance

SAQA defines the NQF as a quality assurance system:

> The NQF is essentially a quality assurance system with the development and registration of standards and qualifications as the first important step in implementing a quality education and training system in South Africa (SAQA, 2000c:3).

Quality is seen as a process:

> [The SAQA] quality assurance system enhances quality of the institution and their learning programmes in terms of fitness for purpose. The emphasis is on quality as a process… (Naude, 2003:276).

According to SAQA (2000) there are three common understandings of quality that can be associated with the NQF. The first is premised on:

> …representative and participatory processes and structures in which a variety of views, thinking and practice and experiences are brought together…the definition and understanding of quality is arrived at through broad participation, negotiation and synthesis (*Ibid.*, 4).

The second understanding of quality is based on five objectives of the NQF in that the NQF ‘seeks to establish a coherent, integrative education and training system that provides a platform for a unifying approach’ (*Ibid.*).

The third is linked to the implementation processes of the NQF- mainly the establishment and registration of standards (through the SGBs and NSBs) that is complemented by the quality assurance and management for the achievement of the standards (through the ETQAs).

> The quality assurance system adopted is one in which [ETQAs] are accredited to safeguard and improve the delivery and achievement of NQF-registered standards and qualifications. It is though these structures that the needs of society and the learner can be brought together in balanced and accommodative ways (SAQA, 2000:10).

Separate quality assurance and education and training provisioning

The SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) distinctly separates quality assurance and education and training provision:

> The principle of separating “referee” and “player” make it necessary to distinguish clearly between providers, assessors, [quality] assurance, and assessment achievements. In short, ETQAs cannot apply for accreditation as constituent providers (SAQA, 2001c:37).

Before the SAQA Act (SA, 1995) was passed, the DoE (1996:44) suggested two categories of ETQAs: provincial departments of education that set up ETQAs for their Province; and SETAs. The suggestion was partially realised in that ETQAs were eventually accredited from two distinct sectors (see SAQA, 2001:14): Education and training sub-system (HEQC and GENFTEQA) and the Economic sector (SETAs, Professional Statutory Councils, Professional Institutes). The function and composition of ETQAs, particularly the two band ETQAs, HEQC and Umalusi (previously GENFETQA), were continually contested, more so because they were required to report to SAQA, which was not deemed a body correctly positioned to be able to offer such oversight. Despite the contestations, SAQA required ETQAs to have national stakeholder representation at decision-making level in terms of the primary focus of the particular ETQA.

ETQAs can also take on a variety of forms:

> …ETQA models range from statutorily constituted single focus bodies to line functions within other bodies and structures (SAQA, 2001c:39).

Shalem, Alias and Steinberg (2004) offer a noteworthy critique of outcomes-based quality assurance: they argue that the quality of an academic course cannot be evaluated by judging it against pre-specified outcomes. According to Allias (2003 in Shalem *et al*, 2004) the lack of critique in South Africa, as compared to elsewhere in the world, can be ascribed to the democratisation process – she describes the South African quality assurance system as stemming from both the desire to protect learners and improve quality, and the 'need for the state to create a regulatory framework' (*Ibid*., 54).

The quality of an academic course cannot be evaluated by judging it against pre-specified outcomes

They further argue that the use of such regulatory (and bureaucratic) processes to address problems of conceptual misalignment have led to a marginalised quality assurance process – one that is unable to judge the quality of a course. They advise academics to refrain from complying with 'the new regime of regulation' as this will be tantamount to becoming an accessory to the *creation of new knowledge production* that 'flattens depth, eradicates the value of the tradition, [and] increases serious mistrust in academic practice' (*Ibid.*, 74).

SAQA's (2000:3) counter argument was that the South African NQF is built on two basic tenets: A balance between the society's needs and the needs of the individual; and knowledge creation through partnerships between societal groupings:

> …from academics and researchers to business, from workers to professional experts, from government to community organisations, from learners to professors.

Allias and Shalem (2005:8) also argue that there are severe limitations of 'thinking about quality in higher education through the discourse of outcomes-based standards'. They suggest that the 'danger of postmodernism' is unlikely to be resolved by quality assurance processes, as 'the problem lies in the way in which knowledge is developed rather than in the way in which it is measured procedurally' (2005:8):

> …the outcomes-based approach [to quality assurance] is costly, time consuming, and could be used to disguise bad practice through forms of window dressing… (Allias and Shalem, 2005:9).

(Dangers are listed as flawed conceptions of knowledge, bad teaching, weak forms of assessment and bad forms of curriculum design.)

Stephenson (2003), in a very similar argument to the one offered by Shalem *et al*, argues for saving quality from quality assurance. He is concerned that although quality assurance systems may begin with the nest intentions, they often end up 'spawning a "tick box" mentality' that eventually damages the reputation of higher education. His concerns are based on Barnett's (1994) theory that control over 'academic endeavour' is gradually being transferred to administrators – administrators that welcome quality assurance systems:

> No wonder that academic are wary: the control and steering inherent in quality assurance systems is irresistibly tempting for administrators and policy makers (Stephenson, 2003:333).

Importantly, Stephenson supports Webbstock's (2001) argument that the newly established quality assurance system in South Africa (implying the NQF) should remain cheap and simple, and not become too bureaucratic and resource intensive – instead, they argue, the South African system has begun:

> …so complex, so resource-intensive, so bureaucratic in its orientation, that institutions are likely to wilt under the weight of compliance, or attempt to circumvent this particular system altogether…(Webbstock, 2001 in Stephenson, 2003:33).

In summary, Stephenson lists a number of lessons to be learnt to improve the quality of quality assurance and to avoid South Africa becoming another "global casualty":

- bureaucracy must be minimised;
- an external quality assurance agency (such as the HEQC and/or SAQA) should position itself as a support mechanism rather than an inspectorate (cf. Umalusi's [2004:5] suggestions for moving in exactly the opposite direction, i.e. to establish a national inspection system);
- 'There is a real danger of making the measurable important when the important is unmeasurable' (*Ibid.*, 334) – this practice fosters a "league-table mentality" which can lead to wide-spread window-dressing;
- a developmental approach to quality assurance is necessary; and
- 'In order to save quality from the quality assurance bureaucracy, responsibility and control must ultimately rest with staff and students within higher education institutions' (*Ibid.*, 337).

The CHE has expressed concerns of the inconsistency in the use of terms in quality assurance nomenclature:

> The use of key quality assurance terms is not the same across the board. For example, the HEQC uses the term programme accreditation, some organisations use the term programme approval…There is thus considerable potential for confusion on the part of providers… (CHE, 2004b:6).

The main objective of the QFL is quality assurance through the setting of standards, assessment, moderation and verification, and accreditation (Lesotho, 2004).

It is widely acknowledged that the separation of accreditation from the issuing and recognition of qualifications has been problematic in the English system (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

ACTIVITY 8.7

(1) Discuss the need to match the “size” of the NQF quality assurance system with the size of the country.

(2) Describe the quality assurance systems that have been developed in South Africa and are being proposed for SADC. Compare these with each other.

(3) What is your opinion on the comments that the “he quality of an academic course cannot be evaluated by judging it against pre-specified outcomes”?

8.10 Standards setting

According to SAQA (2000:11) the ‘form in which the standards and qualifications are registered on the NQF’ is an integral part of the quality of the national education and training system. Through its NSBs and SGBs, SAQA has established a hierarchy of bodies that are able to develop standards and qualifications in such a form that includes (SA, 1998b):

- specific outcomes to be assessed;
- assessment criteria and moderation process; and
- range statements (guide for the scope, context and level);

An NSB represents the interests of a specific field and consist of stakeholder groupings that play the role of “wise elders” – they do not necessarily have the expertise to generate standards for every sub-field – this is delegated to the SGBs that are made up of subject matter experts (SAQA, 2000).

Standards setting is seen as separate from curriculation, learning programme content and assessment:

> …standards setting [in South Africa] is not about developing a curriculum of syllabus (learning programme) but about specifying end results or competencies which the learner should have achieved on being awarded the qualification (Seychelles, 2004:14)
>
> In terms of the registration of unit standards and qualifications, the point needs to be made that *courses*, i.e. the learning content of a *learning programme* is not registered on the NQF. What is registered on the NQF is a description of the outcome, or the *result of learning*. The course (content) therefore is the vehicle whereby providers of education and training ensure that learners meet the requirements of the unit standard and/or qualification. Learning programmes/learning content may be subject to programme evaluation initiated by the Education and Training Quality Assurance Body (ETQA), but will never appear as such on the NQF (SAQA, 2004j:12, emphasis in original).

Ultimately, standards setting is the process of the development of national standards that specify, through outcomes, the end results or competencies which the learner can achieve. The NSB Regulations (SA, 1998b) describe such a standard as:

> …specific descriptions of learning achievements agreed by all major stakeholders in the particular area of learning.

SAQA (2000:16) goes even further, arguing that national standards are:

> …agreed repositories of knowledge about “quality practice” or competence, as well as about legitimate criteria for assessing such competence.

According to SAQA (2000) the primary *users* of such national standards are: the world of work (e.g. in performance appraisal, recruitment and career progression); the world of curricula; and the professional world (i.e. professional bodies require standards against which professionals can be licensed [cf. Keevy, 2005]). On the other hand the *uses* of standards are as: a guide to learners and educators; descriptions of end points of learning and what must be assessed; and a means of recognising achievements.

Since the early 1990s, the NQF has included a strong focus on the separation of the quality assurance and standards setting systems. More recently (DoE and DoL, 2003 and DoE, 2004) suggestions have been made to allow both processes to be placed under one roof. This is in direct contradiction to SAQA’s long standing position that the integrity of the NQF will be affected:

> …the integrity of the NQF is established by the separate and yet, inter-linked process of standards setting and quality auditing of learning provision. The separation breaks down elitist power enclaves that could result in narrow, inward looking definitions of quality and, therefore, the delivery of learning provision whose beneficial impact on personal development and national socio-economic development…is inadequate, inappropriate and irrelevant (SAQA, 2000:7)

According to Granville (2001), many NQFs have separated standards setting from curriculum and assessment design, although Ireland and Scotland are exceptions:

Many NQFs have separated standards setting from curriculum and assessment design

> The process of standards setting in the NQF is explicitly separated from the function of curriculum and assessment design. In other systems, notably Scotland and Ireland, this distinction is not as absolute (*Ibid.*, 14).

ACTIVITY 8.8

(1) Briefly discuss at least models of standards setting that can be employed within the context of NQFs.

(2) Do you agree that standards setting and curriculum design (and assessment) should be separated? Support your position with an example.

8.11 Organising fields

In order to categorise different types of learning (and knowledge), NQFs divide education and training into a number of organising fields. South Africa has twelve organising fields with a range of sub-fields (SAQA, 2000c:6):

1. Agriculture and nature conservation
2. Culture and arts
3. Business, Commerce and Management
4. Communication Studies and Language
5. Education, Training and Development
6. Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
7. Human and Social Studies
8. Law, Military Science and Security
9. Health Sciences and Social Services
10. Mathematical, Physical, Computer and Life Sciences
11. Services
12. Physical Planning and Construction

In Brazil some twenty organising areas are used (Zuniga, 2004:35); in Mexico a classification of twelve areas and 70 sub-areas is used; in Australia national industry competencies are recognised at four levels in a wide range of trades, industries and enterprises; and in Trinidad and Tobago the TTNVQ covers six specific industries (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

ACTIVITY 8.9

What organising mechanism has been used in your country? Do you envisage changing this, if so, to what?

8.12 Conclusions

This section has covered a range of different architectural components of NQFs, ranging from qualifications, OBET, credits, databases, level, assessment, quality assurance, standards setting and organising fields. Each section also included some component-specific findings as they pertain to the development and implementation of the South African NQF. The following are some overarching observations:

Agnosticism of the NQF

The South African NQF is agnostic on learning processes, curriculum specifications, teaching and learning methodologies (Granville, 2003) and assessment design (SAQA, 2004j). The NQF is also institution-free, i.e. qualifications are viewed as equivalent independent from the education and training provider where they are offered as long as the provider meets the minimum accreditation requirements (0berholzer, 1994b). Furthermore, the NQF separates outcomes (in the form of unit standards and qualifications) from inputs (learning programmes) (SAQA, 2000c). There is also limited correlation between credits, time taken and the mode of delivery and assessment (Blackmur, 2004).

As Granville points out, this agnosticism has the potential to invoke fears from educationalists of utilitarianism, functionalism and reductionism, but also, as Oberholzer warns, to cast doubt on the integrity of the NQF:

> Although in theory a NQF is institution-free, in reality I believe it is not possible to separate a qualification from the providing institution and more specifically from the philosophy that governs the provider. If the NQF ignores this, the market place will make its own assumptions of the value of the qualification and the integrity of the NQF is lost! (Oberholzer, 1994b:22).

NQF as panacea

Unrealistic expectations, first of the NQF, then of OBET and thereafter RPL have continually plagued South African NQF implementation. Following from McGrath's (1996) "no feasible alternative response" and Weick's (1995, in Granville, 2003) "when you're lost, any old map will do…when you're confused, any old strategic plan will do" it seems as if South Africans have indeed been frantically looking for a panacea for the ills that the apartheid legacy had left behind. This does not necessarily mean that that the NQF idea was faulty, as Granville (2003:262) points out:

> The danger is, however, that ideas and practices that have evolved in one set of circumstances may be taken and adapted to another, quite different, set of management requirements. In this case, the requirements may be those of bureaucratic sanity at the expense of innovative practice.

The NQF as a regulatory mechanism

Various examples support the notion that the purpose of the South African NQF is to affect social transformation, but also to regulate. There are however various calls for a simple, developmental and non-bureaucratic system.

Diverging views of the extent to which ETQAs regulate their sectors exist. Authors express concerns about prescriptive nomenclature (that can become redundant) and the quantification of learning (i.e. making the measurable important when the important is unmeasurable (Stephenson, 2003). Some ETQAs, on the other hand, are of the opinion that state control in some sectors, e.g. private provisioning, is inadequate:

> Currently, the controls exercised by the state on private provision in all sectors are weak, if non-existent (Umalusi, 2004:3).

NQFs bring about change

Radical shift in assessment practices, the placement of qualifications in the public domain and the establishment of a single national qualifications register are examples of how the South African NQF has brought about change.

The NQF is influenced by external pressures

The inclusion of OBET in qualifications and lifelong learning are two examples of how the South African NQF has been influenced by international developments. The NQF, OBET and lifelong learning share a number of similarities: they are all contested, often linked to vocationalism, are associated with systemic transformation and most importantly, are “reinvented” in individual countries.

According to Walters (2002), one of the first steps in South Africa was to develop a contextual working definition of lifelong learning that also has some international currency. The same happened to OBET (Isaacs, 2001) and the NQF itself, consisting of such varying ranges of typological components across different countries. Walters draws on the work of Taylor *et al* (2002) to show that lifelong learning is, amongst others, associated with vocationalism and performativity, social control and incorporation, radical social purpose and community development.

The NQF, OBET and lifelong learning may have become uneasy (although very compatible) bedfellows as a result of the commonalities that they share, but also due to external pressures.

8.13 Test yourself

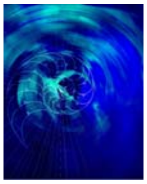
Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. All education and training that takes place within a country should be reflected on the NQF.
2. Different types of qualification can be registered on an NQF.
3. Once a qualification is registered on the NQF it does not need to be reviewed on a regular basis.
4. Professional qualifications are unique and should be managed by professional bodies – they should not be included on the NQF.
5. Lesotho qualifications are in an outcomes-based format.
6. South Africa claims to have reinvented OBET.
7. All NQFs are CAT systems.
8. A national qualifications register is very expensive and difficult to maintain.

9. Level descriptors are notoriously difficult to develop.
10. The more levels an NQF has, the more difficult it is to maintain.
11. RPL differs from normal assessment.
12. A fully functional NQF needs elaborate quality assurance and standards setting systems.
13. Most NQFs have opted to separate standards setting from curriculum and assessment design.
14. Discipline-based organising fields (such as those traditionally used at universities) are a useful way to organise qualifications on an NQF.
15. NQFs are severely influenced by external pressures.

ACTIVITY 8.10

Turn to Study Unit 10 and complete the section on NQF Architecture.



STUDY UNIT 9: GOVERNANCE OF NQFS

9.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is meant by NQF governance
- discuss the key components of good governance
- discuss the regional conventions that are relevant to the SADC countries
- list the key pieces of legislation that form part of the South African education and training system
- discuss the value of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)
- explain the role of the NQF implementing agencies
- describe the different types of NQF implementing agencies
- discuss the roles and responsibilities of government departments in NQF development and implementation
- discuss the role of international agencies in NQF implementation
- discuss the role of stakeholders in NQF implementation
- explain the funding mechanisms that are used to support NQF development and implementation
- consider the most appropriate governance model for your NQF

9.2 Overview

According to a recent CHE report (2002:14) governance includes:

> …all activities that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage an institution, sector or process.

Governance is all activities that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage an institution, sector or process

Applying this understanding of governance to the NQF, and bearing in mind that NQFs also have covert purposes, results in the following:

> NQF governance includes all activities that are overt and/or covert efforts to guide, steer and control NQF development and implementation.

Drawing from the CHE report (*Ibid.*) again, good NQF governance will ensures that:

> …policies and systems are in place in order to manage and administer institutions in an effective and efficient manner to achieve their, as well as the [NQF’s], objectives.

Drawing on the same report (*Ibid.*), Badat (2004:3) distinguishes between the *governance of quality* and the *quality of the governance of quality*. Badat suggest that the *governance of quality* should include the activities as noted above, and that the *quality of the governance of quality* is a consequence of three related factors:

- quality assurance system building and implementation;
- thoughtful, creative, imaginative and innovative, and highly consultative systems building including frameworks, policies, criteria, etc.;
- forging of democratic consensus.

Badat's comments are relevant to NQF development and implementation in that they offer a means of evaluating the quality of the governance as associated with the NQF. Aspects that are highlighted are: the achievement of the overt purposes of the NQF through specific activities; the range of policies and systems that are in place to achieve the NQF's purposes; and the extent to which NQF governance is participatory and consensus-based. These aspects will be revisited at the end of this section.

This section also includes a number of international examples, although, as before, the discussion focuses on national legislation and regional agreements that affects the South African NQF in particular.

The following aspects related to NQF governance are discussed in this section:

- **Regional conventions, NQF-related legislation in South Africa (and in other countries) and memoranda of understanding (MoUs)** – Conventions and declarations applicable to the South African NQF, relevant South African legislation and the agreements between ETQAs are discussed.
- **Implementing agencies** – this section discusses the qualification authorities and other main overseeing and implementing agencies tasked to develop and implement NQFs.
- **Government departments**.
- **International roleplayers**.
- **Stakeholders** – interpreted as all NQF roleplayers (except for the implementing agencies, international agencies and governments) these are the education and training providers, the public associations, the lecturers and teachers, and many more.
- **Funding** – the various sources of NQF funding and the impact of extensive donor involvement.

9.3 Regional conventions, national legislation and memoranda of understanding

Three levels of agreements relevant to NQF governance are discussed. The first is regional and does not include enforceable legislation, but is based on voluntary participation, trust and agreements. The regional frameworks, and to some extent the national frameworks that focus on international comparability, are heavily dependent on regional agreements and conventions. An awareness of cross-border challenges also exists:

> Meeting the challenges of cross-border education will require a coherent effort not only by higher education providers, but also by governments and competent authorities within nations (IA and others, 2005:4).

The second level is national legislation. Most, but not all, NQFs are established through rigorous legislative processes that include consultations and eventually parliamentary approval of NQF Acts. Strong and prescriptive frameworks, such as the South African NQF, cannot function without should a legislative basis, whereas looser and weaker frameworks, such as Australia, SADC and the EU, are less dependent on legislation:

> [The proposed EQF] will therefore be entirely voluntary without legal obligations on Member States (Gordon, 2005:4).

The third level originates form voluntary processes between quality assurance bodies, but become legally enforceable once MoUs are signed.

Regional conventions

The African regional agreements that influence academic mobility and credit transfer in the region are:

- Arusha Convention (2003) (UNESCO, 2004)
- SADC Education and Training Protocol (2000) (SADC Secretariat, 1997)
- Accra Declaration on GATS and the internationalisation of higher education in Africa (2004) (Knight, 2004)

Similar conventions and developments exist in the EU. Examples include the Lisbon Strategy (2000), the Bologna Declaration (1999), the European Common Quality Assurance Framework (CQAF) (2003) (CEDEFOP, 2004) and CARICOM region agreements (see Zuniga, 2004).

> Meeting the challenges of cross-border education will require a coherent effort not only by higher education providers, but also by governments and competent authorities within nations (IA and other, 2005:4).
>
> Governments can be influential in promoting adequate quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in all countries and may have overall policy coordination in most higher education systems (OECD and UNESCO, 2005:3).

Arusha Convention (1981, amended 2003)
According to the Arusha Convention African countries have been ‘long thwarted by colonial domination and the consequent division of the African continent’. The Arusha convention calls for intensive co-operation between African states whilst respecting the character of their education and training systems. It is a regional convention on the recognition of higher education studies and degrees in Africa was adopted on 5 December 1981 in Arusha, Tanzania, with a view to promoting regional co-operation through the academic mobility of lecturers and students. The Arusha Convention is a framework agreement which provides general guidelines meant to facilitate the

implementation of regional co-operation relative to the recognition of studies and degrees through national, bilateral, sub-regional and regional mechanisms that exist or are created for that purpose (UNESCO, 2004). The Arusha convention was revised in Cape Town (June 2002) and finally amended in Dakar (June 2003).

The Arusha convention is implemented at three different levels: a national level, by the national commissions for the recognition of studies and degrees; a sub-regional level, by sub-regional organs like the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education and the technical committee of the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and the regional level, by the Regional Committee in charge of implementing the Arusha Convention (*Ibid.*).

According to Allias (2004) the Arusha Convention aims to enforce African solidarity and promote African cultural identity by calling for the setting up of national and sub-regional bodies to implement activities. It stresses not only for recognition of diplomas, but also for recognition of stages of study, and knowledge and experience required, in order to ensure greater mobility of students and people engaged in an occupation throughout the African continent.

SADC Education and Training Protocol (2000)

The SADC Education and Training Protocol entered into legal force in July 2000. The Protocol was adopted and signed by the Summit Heads of States of the SADC Member States as a policy framework and mechanism for regional cooperation in the improvement of education within the SADC region and to raise the standard of education and training systems. It seeks to create conditions intended to assist member countries to move progressively towards the attainment of equivalence and harmonization of the education and training systems. It stresses the principles of information exchange and resource sharing through the promotion of regional centres of specialization and centres of excellence. The movement and/or exchange of students, staff, teaching and learning materials, and the relaxation of immigration and customs procedures, are to be facilitated as basic features of the integrated regional system (Kunene, undated).

Accra Declaration on GATS and the internationalisation of higher education in Africa (1995)

According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO, 1999) the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is one of the most important developments in the multilateral trading system since 1948. For the first time internationally-agreed rules and commitments into a huge and still rapidly growing area of international trade.

The GATS has three parts (Knight, 2004): a framework which contains the general principles and rules, national schedules that list a country’s specific commitments on access to its domestic markets by foreigners and annexes that details specific limitations for each sector.

GATS has an emphasis on sharing knowledge, international cooperation, and using new technologies to reduce gaps in wealth, social well being, and educational opportunity. GATS also cautions against the reduction of Higher Education to a tradable commodity subject to international trade rules, and the loss of authority of national governments to regulate higher education according to national needs and priorities (Alias, 2004).

ACTIVITY 9.1

Summarise those aspects from the regional conventions that are most relevant to NQF implementation in a SADC country.

South African NQF-related legislation

The following acts and regulations, as applicable to the South African NQF, are briefly discussed in this section:

- South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995)
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)
- Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies Regulations (1998)
- National Standards Bodies Regulations (1998)
- South African Schools Act (No. 108 of 1996)
- Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997)
- Further Education and Training Act (No. 98 of 1998)
- Adult Basic Education and Training Act (No. 52 of 2000)
- Draft regulations on the registration of private Higher Education institutions (2001)
- General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act (No. 58 of 2001)
- Draft regulations on the registration of private Further Education and Training institutions (2002)
- Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998)
- Skills Development Levies Act (No. 9 of 1999)

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)
The South African Constitution ‘involved many South Africans in the largest public participation programme ever carried out in South Africa’ (Potgieter *et al*, 1997:20). The objective in this process was to ensure that the final Constitution is ‘legitimate, credible and accepted by all South Africans’. The fundamental human rights of every person are protected (*Ibid.*). Education and training is affected in that all government bodies are subject to the constitution, and any law or conduct, including parliamentary legislation, inconsistent with the Constitution is invalid and can be struck down by the courts (Bray in Berka *et al*, 2000:244).

South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995)
The SAQA Act was promulgated to:

- provide for the development and implementation of the NQF;
- establish the South African Qualifications Authority; and
- provide for matters connected therewith.

The SAQA Act focuses on the establishment and functions of SAQA, which is mainly to oversee the development of the NQF, and includes the registration of accreditation bodies (ETQAs) and national standards and qualifications. SAQA is tasked to take the necessary steps to ensure that ETQAs comply with accreditation provisions.

Two regulations are associated with the SAQA Act:

- *ETQA Regulations* (SAQA, 1998b) – which according to SAQA (2001d:6) is but one layer of an enabling regulatory framework for the development and implementation of the NQF.
- *NSB Regulations* (SAQA, 1998a) - The NSB Regulations promulgate the structure of the NQF into eight levels, three bands and twelve organising fields. The regulations also task SAQA to develop unique field and level descriptors. The requirements and procedures for the registration of standards and qualifications are listed. The establishment and registration of NSBs and SGBs are explained.

South African Schools Act (No. 108 of 1996)
The SA Schools Act was promulgated to provide for a uniform system of organization, governance and funding of schools. This Act is an attempt to set uniform norms and standards for the education of learners, including compulsory attendance, code of conduct and the role and function of governing bodies. There is also a reference to the establishment and registration of independent schools.

De Groof *et al* (1998:51) argue that the Schools Act gives the State ‘a vice grip, which it can and probably will tighten, on the governance and management of public schools’.

Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997)
The HE Act was promulgated to regulate the HE sector and provide for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council on Higher Education (CHE). It also provides for the registration of private HE institutions and quality assurance and quality promotion in the HE sector.

Further Education and Training Act (98 of 1998)
The purpose of the FET Act is to “establish a national co-ordinated FET system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based FET” (FET Act, 1998:5). The FET Act was promulgated to regulate the FET sector, provide for the registration of private FET institutions and quality assurance and quality promotion in the FET sector.

Adult Basic Education and Training Act (No. 52 of 2000)
The ABET Act was promulgated to regulate adult basic education and training, to provide for the registration of private adult learning centres and quality assurance and quality promotion in ABET.

Draft regulations on the registration of private Higher Education institutions (DoE, 2001a)
The requirements for the registration of private HE institutions as suggested in the HE Act (No. 101 of 1997) are amended by these

regulations. The requirements for registration are listed in much more detail and point towards a duplication of the SAQA/ETQA processes.

General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act (No. 58 of 2001)
The GENFETQA Act was promulgated to provide for the Establishment of the GENFETQA Council, Quality assurance in general and further education and training and control over norms and standards of curriculum and assessment. All provincial education departments are deemed accredited as a public provider by the GENFETQA council. The Act tasks the GENFETQA council to develop criteria for the accreditation of private providers; this includes independent schools (as defined in the SA Schools Act), private FET institutions (as defined in the FET Act) and private centres (as defined in the ABET Act).

Draft regulations on the registration of private Further Education and Training institutions (DoE, 2002)
The requirements for the registration of private FET institutions as suggested in the FET Act (No. 98 of 1998) are amended by these regulations, and suggest a much more aggressive approach. The requirements for registration are listed in much more detail and also point towards a duplication of the SAQA/ETQA processes. According to these regulations anyone that intends to establish and maintain a private further education and training institution must apply to the registrar in terms of these regulations. Registration is defined as: “the granting of an application to operate as a private further education and training institution in terms of the Act [FET Act, No. 98 of 1998], offering such programmes leading to registered qualifications on such sites as the registrar may approve in terms of these regulations” (DoE 2002:6).

Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998)
The Skills Development Act was promulgated to ‘provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce…’ The institutional framework includes the establishment of a National Skills Authority (NSA) and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). One of the main purposes of the Act is to ensure the quality of education and training in and for the workplace. The Act also prescribes that SETA should apply to SAQA for accreditation as ETQAs.

Skills Development Levies Act (No. 9 of 1999)
The Skills Development Levies Act was promulgated to provide for the imposition of a skills development levy, and for matters connected therewith.

ACTIVITY 9.2

What observations do you make when reading through the list of South African legislation? Try to list at least five.

NQF-related legislation in other countries

Two acts are important to NQF implementation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: *Education Act* (1997) that established the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and *the Learning and Skills Act* (2000) that established the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In Ireland the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act* (1999) established the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and also outlined the Irish NQF. The Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA) was established through the *Namibian Qualifications Act* (1996). The *Education Act* (Scotland) (1996) established the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (www.logos-net.net/ilo, accessed 15 April 2005).

There are some exceptions to the above. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) has 'no legislative basis and no authority that has the capacity to accredit or regulate awards' (Keating, 2003:278). The AQF is rather based on agreements particularly for VET, although the Higher Education and schooling sectors remain autonomous. According to Keating this is also one of the reasons why the AQF has had little impact in these sectors.

Most countries that are in the early stages of NQF implementation, such as the SADC Member States (see *Table 8*), either have draft legislation formulated or passed – the SADCQF however appears to be taking a different tack:

> In most (if not all) countries, NQFs are established through the promulgation of national acts. Depending on their particular purposes, such legislation also leads to the establishment of national agencies mandated to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. In the case of the SADCQF, no similar regional legislative process is envisaged (SADC TCCA, 2005:23).

Clearly the SADCQF, as an RQF, cannot be supported, nor established, by legislation, but has to revert to the earlier mentioned regional agreements and conventions – in this case the SADC Education and Training Protocol (2000). Similarly, the EQF is based on the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna Process (Clark, 2004).

Memoranda of understanding

In 2004, the CHE prepared a working document that mapped out the CHE's plan for addressing the MoU dilemma. In the plan the CHE acknowledges the pressure that it is being faced with:

> At the moment, for various reasons, the CHE/HEQC is under extreme pressure to sign MoUs with ETQAs (CHE, 2004b:3).

In brief, the CHE suggests a careful and cautious approach consisting of a number of phases:

1. The compilation of a directory of ETQAs and professional councils – this was completed in 2003 (CHE, 2003).

2. Examining the accreditation criteria, processes and procedures of each ETQA to identify areas of overlap and duplication – to be followed by the development of a generic MoU as well as tailor-made MoUs (based on the generic version) to suit each ETQA.
3. Signing and piloting of MoUs.
4. Constant monitoring of accreditation criteria, procedures and processes, including the annual review of MoUs.

The MoU models proposed by the CHE (2004) are:

- Delegation – if the ETQA/professional council has an effective quality management system, has aligned itself to the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria (see CHE, 2004c) and uses peer evaluation, etc.
- Partial delegation - if the HEQC is not sure/confident about the quality management systems of the ETQA/professional council.
- Partnership – if the ETQA/professional council has no quality management system

SAQA (2005j:4) suggests that MoUs do not define the responsibilities for quality assurance functions but are rather "agreements to agree":

> The MoUs appear to have been put in place for the sake of complying with the requirement rather for the purpose that was intended and for this reason they do not address the operational issues such as overlaps and duplication of quality assurance practices. This was confirmed by an ETQA manager who said "the MoUs are there as to comply with SAQA's requirements, not because its for a good cause. They are of so generic a nature as to prelude any useful functions".

In the *Consultative Document* the DoE and DoL (2003) express similar concerns, suggesting that the lack of delineation of scope and responsibility, within the current quality assurance system, had resulted in much efforts being directed at the development of MoUs:

> Some [MoUs] have been successful, but since MoUs must be agreed on a case-by-case basis they tend to be unwieldy and time-consuming to construct and operate. A clearer quality assurance framework would remove the need for such cumbersome processes (*Ibid*., 10).

ACTIVITY 9.3

In your view, do you think there is a place for MoUs in the NQF system? If not, what alternative do you suggest?

9.4 Implementing agencies

Implementing agencies are the main bodies established through legislation, and tasked by governments to oversee the development and implementation of NQFs. In most countries a national qualification authority has this responsibility and oversees a number of sector-, band- or level-specific bodies. The qualification authorities have varying degrees of independence and autonomy from government departments. The extent to which they oversee other related bodies also differ, ranging from strong and prescriptive to coordinating and administrative.

Implementing agencies are the main bodies established through legislation, and tasked by governments to oversee the development and implementation of NQFs.

In the case of RQFs the implementing agencies usually consist of a Steering Committee with representatives from all the Member States, and is not established through legislation, but rather through inter-ministerial approval. The SADCQF is such an example:

The SADCQA functions as a voluntary association of SADC Member States, which individually join and support SADCQA... SADCQA reports through its *Regional Steering Committee* to the SADC Secretariat to a sub-committee of the ICM made up of Ministers of Education, Primary Secretaries and Directors General. SADCQA is ultimately accountable to the SADC Council of Ministers (SADC TCCA, 2005:27).

(Government involvement, such as from an education or labour department, is seen as different from the implementing agencies and is discussed in the following section.)

The following are examples of implementing agencies in various countries:

Country	Main implementing agency (agencies)	Examples of sector-, band- and level-specific bodies
South Africa	South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)
Scotland	Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
Ireland	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI)	Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
New Zealand	New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)	Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC), Polytechnics Programme Committee (PPCAP), Colleges of Education Accreditation Committee (CEAC)
Australia	Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB), Victorian Qualifications Authority (VQA), Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC)	National and State/Territory Industry Training Advisory Boards (ITABs)
SADC	Proposed SADC Qualifications Authority (SADCQA)	National qualifications authorities in SADC Member States are represented on the SADCQA Steering Committee
England, Wales and Northern Ireland	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC), Council for Examinations and Assessment for Northern Ireland (CCEA)	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA), Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Unitary Awarding Bodies, Learning and Skills Council (LSC)
Namibia	Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA)	Namibian Training Authority (NTA), Technical Expert Committees
Trinidad and Tobago	National Training Agency (NTA) –only TVET	Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), Specific Occupational Advisory Committees (SOACs)

The following observations about NQF implementing agencies can be made from the table above:

Implementing agencies differ in size
The number of staff and geographical representation of implementing agencies differ greatly. As an example, SAQA grew from a handful of core staff in the late 1990s to a present contingent of more than eighty staff. SAQA has also attempted to establish regional offices in at least three regions, one in the Western Cape that functioned for a number of years. More recently, SAQA has been instructed by the Minister of Education to close the Western Cape Regional Office and suspend all similar attempts (SEE MEHL PAPER ON REGIONAL ISSUES?) - MORE INFO IN SAQA RESPONSE TO CD?

In contrast the Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (AQFAB) has ten times less staff than the Victorian Qualifications Authority (Keating, 2003).

Implementing agencies exist in various models
From the previous table it is observed that three main models of implementing agencies exist:

Strong Authority
At present South Africa (SAQA) is the only example of a *Strong Authority* that *oversees* all other bodies – this is however currently under debate and may probably not remain like this for much longer (DoE and DoL, 2003). Although New Zealand may have started out as a *Strong Authority*, nearly became a *Coordinating Authority* with only coordinating powers (Philips, 2003), it gradually evolved into the weaker *Central Authority* configuration.

Central Authority
A *Central Authority* has responsibility for quality assurance and accreditation but *separate* awarding bodies exist for particular sectors and/or levels, such as for Schooling, VET and Higher Education. The *Central Authority* usually has some oversight function, but cannot prescribe to the awarding bodies. Examples are Ireland (NQAI, FETAC and HETAC), Scotland (SQA and QAA) and New Zealand (NZQA, NZVCC, PPCAP and CEAC).

Coordinating Authority
A *Coordinating Authority* has mainly *administrative and coordinating* powers and is influenced by powerful partners. The AQF is such an example: …the AQF is the weakest partner in a collection of national bodies, not having a ministerial council, substantial personnel and budget, direct constituencies, or the operational capacities of the other agencies. Its influence depends on the willingness of the powerful partners… (Keating, 2003:285). The proposed SADCQF is another example of a *Coordinating Authority*: The SADCQA acts as a coordinating, informing and facilitating body (SADC TCCA, 2005:27).

Implementing agencies have vocational roots
Just as the NQF phenomena itself (see Young, 2005), many of the implementing agencies have their origins in existing TVET agencies, boards and committees. This characteristic is particularly evident in the 2nd and 3rd generation of NQFs, but is not as apparent with the pioneering 1st generation of NQFs (see Table 7). This may be due to the fact that during the implementation of the 1st generation of NQFs, there was a strong drive to elevate qualification frameworks above TVET, to be more inclusive of other sectors, and therefore also purposely not to transform TVET agencies. Despite such attempts the trails are still clear. In South Africa for example, Industry Training Boards (ITBs) were replaced by SETAs, after which SETAs were accredited as ETQAs, which are answerable to SAQA. Until the present day, these SETA-ETQAs make up the majority of ETQAs (25 out of 35).

Implementing agencies have qualification council roots
Just as implementing agencies have strong links back to vocational agencies, they also often originate from, or at least function with, national qualifications councils. Examples include the involvement of many such councils in the development of the SADCQF (SADC TCCA, 2005). Similar trends have occurred in the UK (e.g. the CCEA) and in the Caribbean (Zuniga, 2004). In South Africa, Umalusi is such an example, evolving from the South African Certification Council.

Implementing agencies are part of social transformation
As much as NQFs are not only “qualifications ladders”, but are complex social constructs with very specific purposes, the implementing agencies tasked to oversee and develop them are also projects of social transformation (Granville, 2001) and cannot escape the contestations that accompany, in particular, the tighter frameworks:

> The tendency by some qualifications authorities to act as if they could be ignored is arguably one of the reasons their efforts are reform have sometimes met with strenuous opposition and active resistance (Blackmur, 2004:268)

ACTIVITY 9.4

Briefly describe the different types of NQF implementing agencies. How do you envisage the NQF agency in your country to develop? Is there a need for an agency at all?

9.5 Government departments

NQFs are government-driven initiatives

NQFs are government-driven initiatives. In most cases, governments, through National Departments of Education or Labour or a combination of the two, have a direct involvement in the development and implementation of NQFs. As discussed above, implementing agencies, with varying degrees of independence and powers, are established by the government departments to implement NQFs. In many countries, most notably South Africa and New Zealand (Philips, 2003), tensions have developed between the government departments and the implementing agencies.

The South African case is somewhat complex. Initially SAQA was to answer to an integrated Ministry of Education and Training (NTB, 1994). The integrated Ministry was never established and SAQA ended up being linked to two separate departments, although answerable to the Minister of Education. In the meantime SAQA had secured significant donor funding, up to 80% of its annual budget (EU, 2002), mainly from the EU (lasting up to 2005), but also from CIDA, GTZ, DANIDA, USAID, The British Council, NUFFIC, HEDCO (Ireland) and the Ford Foundation. Although the usual concerns of sustainability were raised, the funding allowed SAQA to become increasingly independent from the government departments – a development that contributed significantly to strained relationships between SAQA and the DoE in the early years of NQF development:

> Relationships with the DoL are fully satisfactorily. Relationships with the DoE are less than satisfactorily… (EU, 2002:55).

To complicate matters further, the relationship between the DoE and DoL came under pressure as their views on the changes to the NQF architecture diverged. Their attempt to put out a joint statement in this regard in 2003 (DoE and DoL, 2003) was not well accepted by stakeholders and they were accused of losing focus of important NQF matters in their attempt to find common ground (NAPTOSA, 2003). Although from a totally different region and context, Zuniga (2004:75) makes an similar point:

> There is no doubt that developing a NQF cannot be left only to one ministry or one single institution…One of the most critical points in an NQF is the coordination between the education and the labour authorities.

Regional frameworks, such as in SADC and the EU are less vulnerable to the influence of government departments, but are nonetheless aware of the pitfalls:

> The [EU] higher education community strongly supports [the moves to consolidate the European Higher Education Area] but sees in them a danger of excessive state-driven uniformity and control, in the service of a dominant ethic of economic competitiveness. They want governments to provide a framework for co-ordination and guidance towards convergence, but not to create a Europe-sized straightjacket (DoE and DoL, 2002:41).

Extent of autonomy of implementing agencies is contentious
Philips (2003) warns that implementing agencies are created by governments and can therefore also be disestablished by the same method. The South African and New Zealand NQFs are such examples, where the qualification authorities were established as “strong” authorities with high levels of independence, but that came under intense scrutiny from government departments in later years.

Relationships between government departments is important
Inevitable differences between education and labour ministries have a significant influence on NQF implementation that can lead to the reconfiguration of NQF architecture and implementing agencies more in an attempt to resolve differences, and less because the system will benefit from the changes.

ACTIVITY 9.6

(1) Which government departments (and institutions) will be involved with NQF development in your country?

(2) What do you envisage the role of each to be?

(3) Do you expect some of these roles to conflict? If so, how can these conflicts be minimised?

9.6 International agencies

International bodies have contributed significantly to the development of education and training systems the world over, but more so in developing countries such as those in SADC. Since 1994 South Africa has received significant support from European-based agencies. Arguably most of this was in the form of funding, although concerted efforts were made to ensure sustainability and skills transfer as well.

International bodies have contributed significantly to the development of education and training systems the world over, but more so in developing countries such as those in SADC

An important point in this regard is that although it cannot be disputed that South Africa and the SADC region have benefited greatly from the involvement of international agencies, some questions regarding the transfer of Eurocentric models into the (South) African context beg answers. NQFs, having originated from the former Colonial powers, have been supported and funded in the South African context, despite the fact that, for example in the EU, no significant similar attempts were being made. It is only more recently that the EQF initiative has gained momentum, hopefully not only because it was successfully piloted in the African region. Concerns from some writers of NQFs as the “new colonisation” are just as important (Tuck *et al*, 2005).

The following three international agencies are briefly discussed below: the ILO, UNESCO and OECD.

International Labour Organisation
The ILO is a tripartheid structure representing governments, organised employers and organised labour. Notably, since 2000, the ILO has commended the establishment of NQFs:

> The development of a [NQF] is in the interest of enterprises and workers as it facilitates lifelong learning, helps enterprises and employment agencies match skills demand and supply, and guides individuals in their choices of training and career (ILO, 2000 in DoE and DoL, 2002:39).

The ILO has been involved in NQF development in a number of countries and regions, over a considerable period. Some of these include Mexico (CONOCER, 1999), South Africa, the UK, the Caribbean (Zuniga, 2004) and Mauritius.

The ILO's involvement in NQF development is evident in a well-managed and up-to-date website that covers a range of NQFs across the world (www.logos-net.net/ilo).

UNESCO
According to the *Study Team Report* (DoE and DoL, 2002) UNESCO's approach to NQFs has been less explicit, but nonetheless supportive, mainly due to their extended involvement on the equivalence of qualifications in the areas of higher education and TVET.

UNESCO has been involved in TVET initiatives, mostly in collaboration with the ILO, in a number of countries and regions: SADC (UNEVOC, 2003 and 2004), West Africa (UNESCO and OECD, 2005), the Arab States, Central Asia and the small Pacific Island States.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
The OECD is made up of 30 industrialised democratic member states and has taken a 'keen interest in the NQF phenomenon in relation to lifelong learning' (DoE and DoL, 2002:40, also see Behringer and Coles, 2003). The OECD has also initiated research programmes on case studies of NQFs in a number of countries.

European Union
The EU is pursuing co-operation programmes (mainly in the field of higher education) in Latin America and the Caribbean, Slovenia, Macedonia and Arabic-speaking Mediterranean states (DoE and DoL, 2002).

The EU's involvement in supporting NQF development in SA has been extensive:

> It is fitting to note that the EU has been the main financial sponsor of South Africa's NQF (DoE and DoL, 2002:42).

Over and above the millions of euros that were contributed to the development and implementation of the NQF (see EU, 2002), the EU also contributed in research and capacity building. One such example if the involvement of NQF experts (funded by HEDCO [Ireland]) in the NQF Impact Study between 2002 and 2005 (SAQA, 2004 and 2005b).

ACTIVITY 9.7

(1) Describe the contribution that international agencies have made (and are having) on NQF development in your country.

(2) To what extent will international agencies impose their agendas on developing countries?

9.7 Stakeholders

A range of NQF roleplayers have already been discussed: the implementing agencies (or qualifications authorities), government departments and international agencies. A last grouping, probably also the most important, although seldom recognised as such, is the NQF stakeholders. This “mixed bag” of education and training providers, learners, employers, employees and unions are collectively referred to as stakeholders although each of them are unique in their interaction with the NQF. They generally stand at the receiving end of NQF implementation with only limited ability to influence it.

Education and training providers in South Africa, ranging from public to private, large to SMME, ABET to Higher Education, are affected most by a NQF that has much more to it than just organising qualifications. From concerns that range from interference with academic freedom, over-regulation to the creation of low-level knowledge through standardisation and regulation, NQF implementing agencies often stand in the firing line of providers. Some providers want to be left alone, and hope that the NQF is the latest fad that will eventually disappear, while others welcome the advanced standing that they receive from complying with the quality assurance criteria. Through associations and committees education and training providers are able to make a significant contribution to NQF development and implementation.

Learners, both young and mature, have very limited means of influencing NQF implementation. In many cases, learners are not even aware of the levels, pathways and articulation options that are associated with an NQF. In South Africa significant attempts have been made to include learners in systemic evaluations such as the NQF Impact Study – through focus groups learners have been able to voice their concerns and at least to some extent, influence NQF implementation (SAQA, 2004d).

Employers, through participation in other national initiatives, such as skills development, often become more directly involved with NQF implementing agencies. In many cases, employers either conduct training for their own staff, or outsource it – on both counts they come into direct contact with quality assurance systems associated with NQFs. The further extents to which salaries, post levels and promotions are related to NQF levels are also important indicators. In South Africa, government departments still use outdated Relative Value Coefficients (RVQs) and Relative Educational Value Coefficients (REVQs) to determine employability and salaries (SAQA, 2004l). This practice has had a spillover effect into the business community, resulting in only limited use of NQF levels.

The vocational origin of most NQFs (in some countries NQFs cover only TVET, e.g. Jamaica, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago) often ensures greater alignment with, and benefits for, organised business.

Employees, just as learners, are in many cases not aware of the benefits of NQFs. Involvement is limited to sporadic attempts to ensure equivalence of qualifications and increasingly, in South Africa, for guidance on RPL possibilities.

Through **organised labour, unions and even political parties** employees are able to have a much more direct influence in NQF implementation. In South Africa in particular, unions have played a significant role during the early conceptualisation period of the NQF (NTB, 1994), but also, albeit to a lesser extent, during the more recent review period. Examples of such involvement are NAPTOSA (2003) and SACP (2003).

In relation to NQF governance stakeholders do have a significant influence. The Boards of implementing agencies and quality assurance bodies are in most cases, representative of the various stakeholder groupings. In South Africa, the SAQA Board is appointed by the Minister of Education, and represents a broad range of stakeholders, such as private education, business and unions. Expert stakeholders also play an important role in the development of qualifications by serving on SGBs and NSBs. Another way in which stakeholders influence NQF development is through submitting comments on discussion documents – such examples include the *Study Team Report* (DoE and DoL, 2002), the *Consultative Document* (DoE and DoL, 2003) and the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* document (DoE, 2004). All SAQA policies and criteria and guideline documents are also published in the Government Gazette to allow for public comments. The same applies to all new qualifications before they can be registered on the NQF.

The South African NQF is a social construct whose ‘meaning has been, and will continue to be, negotiated for the people, by the people’ (Kraak and Young, 2001:30). Despite the fact that the NQF is implemented by the government and a qualifications authority, it is ultimately “the people” (the stakeholders) that negotiate its meaning.

ACTIVITY 9.8

(1) Briefly describe the influence of stakeholders on NQF development. Would you say that this influence is significant?

(2) How can governments ensure that stakeholders buy into the NQF process? How can they make sure that this buy-in is not lost?

9.8 Funding

NQFs are government initiatives and are therefore also mostly government funded. In many countries, if not all, governments have been able to control NQF implementation through funding mechanisms. NQF agencies, such as the qualifications authorities, that become too critical and too autonomous can be brought back into line by adjustments to funding arrangements.

South Africa, some of SADC countries and also some of the CARICOM Member States may be regarded as exceptions, as their funding has not always originated from their governments. With the democratisation of South Africa, the worldwide acknowledgement of the importance of NEPAD, the establishment of the AU and many other home-grown initiatives many first world countries have been willing to offer support in South and Southern Africa. As mentioned earlier, UNESCO, the OECD and the ILO have been supporting the improvement of education for many years – their involvement with NQF development in SADC countries is therefore nothing new either.

The EU has been extremely committed to the South African NQF implementation and has offered both financial and technical support between 1999 and 2005:

> 80% of SAQA funding is received from donors; the DoE provides 17% of funding; 3% is self-generated by SAQA (EU, 2002:43)
>
> It is beyond question that the implementation of the NQF has been made possible by European Union funds, whose local value has increased as the exchange value of the Rand has declined (DoE and DoL, 2002:120).

Smaller strategic grants were also received from CIDA, GTZ, DANIDA, USAID, British Council, NUFFIC, HEDCO (Ireland) and the Ford Foundation (DoE and DoL, 2002:120). Unfortunately the substantial donor funding received by SAQA came at a price, impacting severely on sustainability.

> The issue of sustainability of SAQA has been widely aired, and its dependency on donor funding increasingly poses a high risk to the organisation in terms of its sustainability (*Ibid.*).

By the end of 2004 SAQA was facing a financial crisis as the EU funding drew to a close and a significant budget shortfall became imminent. The crisis was temporally averted when the National Skills Authority offered to cover the shortfall early in 2005.

ACTIVITY 9.9

(1) To what extent should donor funding be used for NQF development and implementation?

(2) What is the most sustanainable funding model for NQFs?

9.9 Conclusions

At the start of this section on governance, Badat's (2004) comments about the quality of the governance of quality were discussed. Based on his comments, it was suggested that three important aspects would have to be revisited, these were:

- achievement of the overt purposes of the NQF through specific activities;
- range of policies and systems that are in place to achieve the NQF's overt purposes; and the
- extent to which NQF governance is participatory and consensus-based.

Based on the observations made in this section, each of these aspects are discussed below and applied to the South African NQF.

Range of policies and systems to achieve the NQF's overt purposes

An extensive array of policies and guidelines has been developed by SAQA since 1998, covering virtually every aspect of NQF implementation. The following are some examples (most of which have already been noted in this section):

- Quality Assurance (SAQA, 2000)
- Standards Setting (SAQA, 2000c)
- Curriculum Development (SAQA, 2000d)
- Generation and evaluation of qualifications and standards (SAQA, 2000e)
- Level Descriptors (SAQA, 2000f and 2001b)
- Providers (SAQA, 2001)
- ETQAs (SAQA, 2001c)
- Assessment (SAQA, 2001d)
- Registration of Assessors (SAQA, 2001e)
- Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2002b)
- Short courses and skills programmes (SAQA, 2004h)
- SMMEs (SAQA, 2004m)
- Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SAQA, 2005j)
- Integrated assessment (SAQA, 2005k)

On the systems level the following developments have taken place:

- 35 ETQA accredited by SAQA – using standardised (although contextually adjusted) quality assurance processes (SAQA, 2005b);
- 616 providers accredited by nine ETQAs (SAQA, 2005b:91);
- 12 NSBs and more than 100 SGBs established (SAQA, 2004:73);
- 8,553 outcomes-based qualifications and 8,208 units standards registered – reflected on the NLRD (SAQA, 2005b:54); and
- 8,138 assessors registered by 12 ETQAs (SAQA, 2005b:89).

Extent to which NQF governance is participatory and consensus-based

The first two aspects of the quality of the governance of quality, as suggested by Badat (2004), seem reasonable well addressed as discussed above. The third aspect, the extent to which NQF governance is participatory and consensus-based, however, is more contentious. From the various governance-related aspects discussed in this section it has been shown, on a number of levels, that there may be some problems in this area.

Examples include: strained inter-ETQA relationships, as manifested in the difficulties around MoUs; "Strong Authorities", such as SAQA, although inherently part of social transformation, often have weak relationships with government departments and due to external pressures, gradually evolve into weaker configurations; and stakeholders have a limited influence on NQF governance.

In summary, it has been shown that the governance of the South African NQF is influenced by regional conventions, national legislation and local agreements. Governance also includes the role and functions of implanting agencies, usually qualifications authorities, government departments, international roleplayers and stakeholders. Funding, more accurately the source of the funding, is also a significant factor. In general it has been shown that on two counts the governance of the NQF is achieving the overt purposes of the NQF, but that there are problems in a third area, extent to which NQF governance is participatory and consensus-based.

9.10 Test yourself

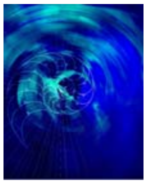
Mark the following statements as true or false.

1. Consultation is a prerequisite for good governance.
2. Regional qualifications frameworks are based on regional conventions.
3. The SADC Education and Training Protocol regulates the movement of learners between SADC Member States.
4. The South African Qualifications Authority Act was the first piece of education and training legislation to be promulgated after democratisation in 1994.
5. Most, if not all, NQFs are established through the promulgation of national acts.

6. Memoranda of Understanding are used to clarify the roles of different quality assurance bodies.
7. Dedicated implementing agencies or authorities usually oversee the implementation of NQFs.
8. Coordinating authorities are influenced by their powerful partners.
9. Tensions between government departments during NQF implementation are unavoidable.
10. International agencies have an important role to play in NQF development.
11. Stakeholders have a significant influence on NQF development and implementation.
12. NQFs are resource-intensive long-term investments
13. Donor funding impacts significantly on sustainability.

ACTIVITY 9.10

Turn to Study Unit 10 and complete the section on NQF governance.



STUDY UNIT 10: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN NQF

10.1 Specific outcomes

By the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- list a number of guidelines for the development and implementation of an NQF
- formulate a position on the various components on an NQF
- explain what considerations need to be given to the context wherein an NQF is implemented
- define your NQF
- identify and list the underlying philosophies that may influence your NQF
- discuss the purpose of your NQF
- discuss the scope of your NQF
- discuss the prescriptiveness of your NQF
- discuss the rate and manner in which your NQF will be implemented
- discuss the policy breadth needed to ensure the effective development and implementation of your NQF
- list the main architectural components of your NQF
- discuss the various governance options related to your NQF
- develop a draft action plan for the development and implementation of your NQF

10.2 Guidelines to develop an NQF

In this section you will be developing your own guidelines based on the discussions that have taken place in the previous study units.

Keep the following points in mind:

- the NQF needs to fit the context of your country
- although we can learn much from other NQFs it is essential to develop a unique model that reflects the purpose as agreed within your country
- incrementalism
- unification
- communities of trust

ACTIVITY 10.1

Before continuing with this study unit, take the time to discuss the list above and then add more points that are really important within your country. Use the space below to make notes on the discussion.

10.3 The context wherein the NQF will be implemented

Here you need to give a detailed overview of the unique context wherein the NQF will be developed and implemented. This may require a detailed action plan on how to obtain the information if it is not readily available.

Examples from other countries include:

- feasibility studies (e.g. in Botswana)
- extensive stakeholder consultations (e.g. in South Africa)

ACTIVITY 10.2

Before continuing with this study unit, take the time to discuss the list above and then add more points that are really important within your country.

As before, try to make detailed notes.

10.4 Defining the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 1 and start to formulate a description of your NQF.

ACTIVITY 10.3

Make detailed notes of your discussion below.

10.5 Philosophies that may guide the development of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 2 and discuss the philosophies that may overtly or covertly influence the development of your NQF.

ACTIVITY 10.4

Make detailed notes of your discussion below.

10.6 Purpose of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 3 and explore the possible purpose(s) of your NQF. Keep in mind that there may be tensions between such purposes and the more overt underlying philosophies.

ACTIVITY 10.5

Make detailed notes of your discussion below. Try to reflect on development that have already taken place within your country and build on these.

10.7 Scope of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 4 and consider the scope of your NQF. Reflect on the extent to which your education and training system is already unified. Also consider the sectors that may prefer to remain outside a national inclusive system.

ACTIVITY 10.6
Make detailed notes of your discussion below.

Also consider how communities of trust may be built between various sectors.

10.8 Prescriptiveness of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 5 and complete the following section of your study guide. As before, this will require you to engage with colleagues and other participants to get a balanced view.

ACTIVITY 10.7

(1) Make detailed notes of your discussion below.

(2) Remember the caveats that were discussed in Study Unit 5. Try to balance these with the purpose of your NQF.

10.9 Incrementalism of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 6 and complete the following section of your study guide. A number of (often conflicting) pressures were discussed - try to list these before you start to consider the timelines for the implementation of your NQF.

ACTIVITY 10.8

Document your thoughts and discussions below.
Also list the processes that are already underway and that may in some way or another influence NQF development and implementation in your country.

10.10 Policy breadth of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 7 and complete the section below.

ACTIVITY 10.9

List all the policies and regulations that are already in place tat would support NQF development. Also consider those that are being planned in the near future.

Discuss the need for a legislative basis for your NQF. Compare this with NQFs that have (and do not have) a similar legislative basis.

Finally, also consider the preferred combination of intrinsic and institutional logic that would best suit your context.

10.11 Architecture of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 8 and complete the section below.

ACTIVITY 10.10

Start by summarising the various architectural components that are associated with NQFs. Try to compare the ways in which different countries have developed each of these components, and then start to discuss how your NQF would be constructed.

Use the following list to guide you:

- qualifications
- OBET
- credit requirements
- qualifications register
- bands, levels and pathways
- assessment
- quality assurance
- standards setting
- organising fields

10.12 Governance of the NQF

Refer to the discussion in Study Unit 9 and complete the section below.

ACTIVITY 10.11

Make detailed notes as discussions on the following NQF governance aspects take place:

- impact of regional conventions
- development of NQF legislation
- need for MoUs
- composition and function of an implementing agency
- role of international roleplayers
- extent tow hich stakeholders will be involved
- source of funding, both during the setting-up phase and in the long term

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10.13 Conclusions

You have come to the end of this guide that has covered each of the various components of NQFs in reasonable detail. In each case you have been asked to apply your understanding to your own context.

In preparing this guide a number of issues stood out for me. I list these below, but then also ask you to add your observations.

There is more to NQFs than qualifications, levels and credits. We all need to understand that NQFs are complex social constructs. This means that we need to be aware of the various other characteristics of NQFs (such as purpose, scope and incrementalism), but more importantly we need to consider these characteristics when developing an NQF. These characteristics (or typological components) provide a blueprint according to which an NQF can be developed to achieve a very specific purpose. Failure to do so results in several unrealistic expectations and endless contestations.

The second point is related to the first. Virtually without exception NQFs implementation is contested and associated with power struggles. Careful planning and extensive consultation go a long way to addressing these problems but they cannot be completely avoided. In my opinion, it is imperative to recognise such power struggles and rather attempt to harness them to the benefit of the NQF – of course, this is a very simplistic way of explaining a complex problem and implementing agencies will have to deal with the problem in much more detail.

A comparison of all NQFs suggests that more incremental approaches are more effective. Scotland, for example, is well on the way to a unified NQF – a process that has been many years. South Africa has attempted to unify its previously fragmented system in less than ten year – at present it appears very unlikely that this is going to be possible.

NQFs with some form of prescriptiveness, but that are mostly loose also appear to be the most effective.

Finally, the need to build communities of trust between institutions, sectors and levels of training is the yeast without which the bakers' bread will not rise, no matter how hot the oven is adjusted, or how many other ingredients are added.

ACTIVITY 10.12

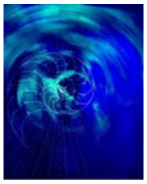
Discuss the observations listed below and add your own to the list.

ACTIVITY 10.13

On a final note, you need to develop a detailed action plan (with dates and responsibilities) if you are serious about developing your NQF. Keep the following points in mind when you do this:

- Which guiding philosophies will influence the NQF
- What is the purpose of the NQF
- What is the scope of the NQF
- How prescriptive will the NQF be
- At what rate will the NQF be implemented
- How will the NQF link to other national and institutional arrangements
- What are the key design features that will make of the architecture of the NQF
- How will the NQF be governed

Such an action plan will require work from a dedicated team of representatives from government but also from other stakeholders.



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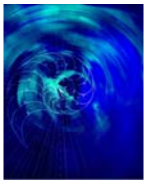

ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework [www.aqf.edu.au]
AU	African Union – Member States are *all African countries with the exception of Morocco* [www.Africa-union.org]
BOTA	Botswana Training Authority [www.bota.org.bw]
BOTQA	Botswana Qualifications Authority (proposed)
CARICOM	Caribbean Community – Member States are *Antigua and Barbuda*, *Bahamas*, *Barbados*, *Belize*, *Dominica*, *Grenada*, *Guyana*, *Jamaica*, *Saint Lucia*, *St. Kitts and Nevis*, *St. Vincent and the Grenadines*, *Suriname*, *and* *Trinidad and Tobago* [www.caricom.org]
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [cedefop.eu.int]
CHE	Council on Higher Education [www.cedefop.eu.int]
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca]
CONOCER	Occupational Competency Standardisation and Certification Council (Mexico) [www.conocer.org.mx]
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency [www.um.dk/danida]
DoE	Department of Education [www.education.pwv.gov.za]
DoL	Department of Labour [www.labour.gov.za]
EAC	East Africa Community – Member states are *Republic of Kenya, Republic of Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania* [www.eac.int]
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States – Member States are *Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo* [www.sec.ecowas.int]
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
EQF	European Qualifications Framework (proposed)
EU	European Union – Member States are *Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom* [www.europa.eu.int]
FET	Further Education and Training

GENFETQA	General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Body
GET	General Education and Training
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft Technishe Zusammenarbeit [www.gtz.de]
HET	Higher Education and Training
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council [www.hsrc.ac.za]
IVETA	International Vocational Education and Training Association [www.iveta.org]
ILO	International Labour Office [www.logos-net.net/ilo]
LQA	Lesotho Qualifications Authority (proposed)
LQF	Lesotho Qualifications Framework (proposed)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority [www.mqa.mu]
NAP	New Academic Policy
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development [allafrica.com/nepad]
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQA	Namibian Qualifications Authority
NQAI	National Qualifications Authority of Ireland [www.nqai.ie]
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
NTA	Namibian Training Authority
NTA	National Training Agency (Caribbean) [www.ntatt.org]
NUFFIC	Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education [www.nuffic.nl]
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification (England)
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority [www.nzqa.govt.nz]
OAU	Organisation for African Unity [www.africa-union.org]
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OBET	Outcomes-Based Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [www.oecd.org]
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community – Member States are *the People's Republic of Angola, Republic of Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kingdom of Lesotho, Malawi, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Republic of Namibia, Republic of South Africa, Kingdom of Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Republic of Zambia and Republic of Zimbabwe* [www.sadc.int]
SADCQA	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Agency (proposed)
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (proposed)
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority [www.saqa.org.za]

SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SMME	Small-, Medium- and Micro Enterprise
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority [www.sqa.org.uk]
TCCA	Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (Southern African Development Community)
TTNVQ	Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification
TVE	Technical and Vocational Education
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TEVETA	Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (Zambia) [www.teveta.org.zm]
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [www.dakar.unesco.org]
USAID	United States Agency for International Development [www.usaid.gov]
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETA (Tanzania)	Vocational Education and Training Authority
VQA	Victorian Qualifications Authority (Australia)
WTO	World Trade Organisation [www.wto.org]
ZIMQA	Zimbabwe Qualifications Authority (proposed)