



THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

2018 Chairperson's Lecture

*Vocational versus occupational qualifications:
Is there a difference, and does it make a difference?*

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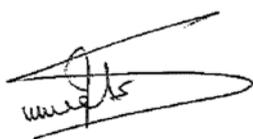
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Foreword

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was the means chosen in 1994 to integrate an unfair education and training system, to make it accessible to all, and to enable quality learning, and transparency. The NQF was established through the SAQA Act, and fine-tuned under the NQF Act – under which there are three articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks coordinated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), Higher Education Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) are overseen by Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) respectively.

Systemic integration and opportunities to articulate along learning-and-work pathways are central goals of the NQF, and are key for addressing the triple scourge of poverty, inequality and unemployment in the country. The recent White Paper for Post-School Education and Training for example, emphasises that there must be ‘no dead ends’ for lifelong learners. It is imperative to understand the nature and differences between, ‘professional’, ‘vocational’ and ‘occupational’ – because these conceptualisations are used to define learning-and-work pathways in the different NQF Sub-Framework contexts. If there is an absence of clear understanding in this regard, it will seriously impact on learners, and cause confusion in the minds of policy makers, policy implementers and policy beneficiaries. We can already see how these debates are impacting on the various sectors, especially in the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context. The effects of the debates are also clear in the decision of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to pilot a ‘three-stream’ model in the Basic Education context.

The purpose of the 2018 SAQA Chairperson’s Lecture is to consider the meaning of ‘occupational’ *versus* ‘vocational’ qualifications, and to illuminate understandings and implications of the conceptualisations of ‘occupational’, ‘vocational’, and ‘professional’ for the education and training system in South Africa. It is the intention that by listening to the Lecture and reading this booklet, that the NQF community will gain insight into the valuable lessons learned to date – for the benefit of all those seeking to develop clearer policy and understanding, and to enable education, training, development and work pathways to work for the people of South Africa.



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Chief Executive Officer
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2018 SAQA CHAIRPERSON'S LECTURE

INTRODUCTION

The question I have been asked to address in this lecture is both seemingly straight-forward and also quite complex: *Vocational versus occupational qualifications – is there a difference, and does it make a difference?*

In theory I could answer the question with a straight-forward 'yes' or 'no' to each part of the question, and perhaps tell you why I think so. We would be done fairly quickly. There are obvious differences that we can agree on immediately. For example, one difference is in the way they are funded, with vocational qualifications funded by the fiscus, and occupational qualifications funded through other mechanisms such as the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). But that would not be interesting or useful, as I am sure everyone already knows this. Answering 'yes' or 'no' to this type of question also assumes that there is only one answer. If you ask an academic to respond to a question, don't expect a simple answer. If you ask an academic a complex question, then expect a lecture!

I want to begin by mapping out what I understand to be the issue or problem with these two labels. In doing so I will add a few other complexities that are linked to the question about vocational *versus* occupational. Once I have mapped out what the problem is, I will address the problem from a number of different perspectives, and then finally try and answer the questions – is there a difference? And does it make a difference?

THE PROBLEM

In South Africa, for various reasons that I will try and explain later, we have a number of different labels for describing education and training programmes and qualifications that prepare students, learners, workers, or employees for work. These qualifications form part of what is termed internationally as the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system (CEDEFOP, 2017)¹ and are referred to in legislation and in various policy documents such as White Papers, Quality Council documentation and ministerial and departmental documents. The qualifications within this system are currently labelled differently. One set of qualifications is mainly, but not solely, delivered in public and private colleges and are known as **vocational** qualifications. Some of these qualifications, such as the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV), carry this label explicitly. Others, such as the NATED N1-N6 qualifications² do not, but they are referred to as vocational programmes.

[In South Africa] We also have other qualifications, part-qualifications, programmes and courses in the system that are labelled as **occupational** qualifications. This term is formalised in the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998, where it defines an occupational qualification.

1 CEDEFOP is the European Union Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

2 National Accredited Technical Education Diploma.

‘Occupational Qualification’ means a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession resulting from work-based learning and consisting of knowledge unit standards, practical unit standards and work experience unit standards (1998:8)

The term is also now generally used to describe the qualifications that are being developed under the auspices of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), and the term is also used in other contexts within the education system. So the question arises, if both types of qualifications³ are supposed to prepare people for the world of work, then what distinguishes them?

Both the term ‘vocational’ and the term ‘occupational’ are used independently of qualifications. For example, as I have already mentioned, ‘vocational’ is used internationally to describe the entire system or field of work-oriented learning, which in our country [South Africa] would include occupational qualifications. Similarly, the term ‘occupation’ is used widely as a term to define all types of work, such as within the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) and similar systems internationally. Therefore, most vocational qualifications prepare people for entry into occupations. And are trades not a type of occupation?

To further complicate things, there are a number of other terms that are associated with education and training programmes that prepare people for the world of work, ie. in the VET system. Certain types of programmes, and certain education and training organisations insert the term **technical** to signal something about the nature of the work that the qualification prepares people for. At times this term is linked to a term like vocational or occupational, and at other times it stands on its own. The term ‘technical’ has been in use for over 100 years, and is usually associated with work that has a technical aspect, ie. it was related to the advent of industrialisation and the introduction of machines. Now of course machines are very different and there is hardly any work that doesn’t involve the use of machines, so often this term is associated with the jobs that service the machines as much as the people who use the machines. Increasingly it refers to technology related occupations. Generally, ‘technical’ suggests a level of skill that is labelled ‘intermediate’, but that is also poorly defined and changes all the time. If you look at the programmes on offer at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, it isn’t always very clear exactly which of these would be labelled technical and which vocational. Or are they all both?

Recently the Department of Basic Education (DBE) has further complicated the terminology by introducing, in its three-stream model, combinations of the above terms that are used differently to their uses in other parts of the system. I am not sure whether the terminology has been finalised but various versions of the model use either ‘vocational’ and ‘occupational’ or ‘technical & vocational’ and ‘technical occupational’. (Note my earlier point about the term ‘technical’). The third stream is the academic stream.

³ For brevity’s sake I will use the term ‘qualification’ to include part-qualifications, courses, and programmes.

In addition to the three streams in Further Education and Training (FET) (in the General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework [GFETQSF] context)⁴, a set of 25 Skills and Vocational Programmes are proposed. The distinctions between the two FET streams are seemingly about the proportion of the practical component, with the former being 50% practical and geared 'mainly for artisanship and professions' while the latter has 75% practical and is 'preparing learners for the world of work' (which raises the question whether artisans and professionals are not part of the world of work?) (Maboya, 2017). The distinctions are made clearer in other DBE and parliamentary documents, which suggest that the technical occupational programme is primarily aimed at learners with learning difficulties and emerges from the history of vocational programmes in schooling being geared towards students who cannot cope with academic learning for various reasons.

There is one more term that I wish to throw into the mix at this stage. It has already been used in the quote from the DBE above, but is generally used to denote higher-level qualifications offered in universities for particular categories of work. That term is '**profession**' or '**professional**'. Professional programmes are also explicitly about preparation for work and often lead to, and are a requirement for, a license to practice a particular type of work. These types of programmes prepare people for types of work that we call 'the professions' and include typically medical professions, engineering, law, accounting, and occasionally also teachers. But there are numerous other types of work that also claim to be professions, and in some fields like engineering and health there are categories that are professional and others that are technical and some that blur between those. Many professional programmes have work-based learning components integrated (for example teaching, medicine and some engineering) or require it as a capping component in order to gain a professional license (such as law and accounting).

All of the above terminological confusion is heightened by the overlapping domains of authority and responsibility and their varying interpretations of what these terms denote. As can be seen for example in the definition of occupational qualifications in the Skills Development Act, this definition includes trades, occupations and professions, yet trades and professions are types of occupations. Furthermore, and this is a dilemma for SAQA, the definition would cover many professional degree programmes at universities and vocational programmes at colleges. This is an issue for quality assurance. Further Education and Higher Education qualifications are located in terms of NQF levels, in the GFETQSF and Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) respectively, while occupational qualifications overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), are positioned in terms of NQF level *as well as purpose*.

The HEQSF refers to three broad qualification progression routes: 'vocational', 'professional' and 'general'. It does not refer to 'occupational', although arguably both vocational and professional

4 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa constitutes three articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks: the GFETQSF overseen by Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). The three NQF Sub-Frameworks are coordinated by SAQA (Republic of South Africa, 2008).

are potentially legally defined as occupational qualifications based on the Skills Development Act. But the HEQSF refers to 'progression routes', while the Skills Development Act talks of 'qualification types'. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) three stream model adds more complexity with its streams that appear to use the terms in different ways. But if the DBE is now training artisans and professionals are they not also offering occupational qualifications? And if not, what is the difference?

At this point I have made my task a lot more complicated, because not only do I need to answer the question as to whether there is a difference between vocational and occupational qualifications, but I also need to ascertain whether there is a difference between these two terms and other terms that are connected to these in our [South African] policy and practice. Added to that complexity, there are a number of different ways in which one can tackle this question. The approach depends on the disciplinary perspective you come from. A philosopher will give you one answer; a sociologist a different one; a policy studies or political scientist; a linguist; an historian – all will answer differently. But in their different ways of answering the question, important distinctions can be made, which ultimately help to come to some sort of conclusion.

In the next section I will attempt to look at the actual meaning of these words. Thereafter I will examine how they are used in other contexts before returning to tracing the way they have evolved in South Africa, before coming back to the question I have been posed.

A QUESTION OF DEFINITION

If one approaches the problem from a philosophical or linguistic perspective, the first question one must address is what the terms 'vocational' and 'occupational' actually mean. If you peruse various dictionaries you will discover that broadly, the two terms mean the same thing. For example the Oxford dictionary⁵ defines *occupational* as 'Relating to a job or profession' and *vocational* as 'Relating to an occupation or employment'. The second term has the first in its definition. Interestingly, the second tier definition of vocational relates to '(education or training) directed at a particular occupation and its skills'. This educational connection is not there for the term occupational.

However, the etymology of the words is slightly different and does suggest that there may be a difference. Occupation comes from the Latin *occupare* or *occupatio* which means 'taking possession' or 'occupy' (hence the two modern meanings of taking up a space, or being occupied, or busy with, some activity). This leads to a largely descriptive understanding without any particular value attached to it. An occupation is something that occupies your time, whether you like it or not, whether it is high status or low status.

There is another way in which 'occupational' is used in an educational and therapeutic sense, namely when forms of activity are used to remediate, punish or keep people busy or usefully

⁵ See <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>, accessed on 5 February 2018.

occupied because they are not able to perform according to some predetermined norm due to a disability. This is the definition of occupational that underpins the branch of health science and psychology known as occupational therapy, but also lies behind reform schools, prison programmes and some school curricula and extra curricula interventions. 'Keeping em busy' is a concept discussed by Hargreaves (1978) regarding schools, but there is a long history of vocational education being viewed in this light, either as something for those less academically able, or for those with learning disabilities. I will return to this later in light of the Three Steam Approach being championed by the DBE at present.

The term 'Vocational' also has its roots in Latin – *vocare*: to call - which over time travelled into French and English as 'a calling' and later in the 15th century was used to refer to a profession. This earlier notion of a calling is different to the descriptive use of the term employed today, as a calling suggests that there is somebody (God, society, an inner moral self) that is doing the calling, which one responds to (Robbins, 1993). This idea of a vocation is often associated with priesthood and the professions – doctors, teachers, (possibly even) lawyers – but is also used with other occupations. The difference is that it implies not just a job one does, but a job one identifies with that carries some purpose for self and others. This notion is similar to the term 'beroep' in Afrikaans, or 'Beruf' in German, which has the same sense of being called to do something. Similarly, in isiZulu the traditional term for teacher, umFundisa, is the same for a preacher, connecting the work of a teacher to something higher.

An argument can be made therefore, that there is a definitional distinction in the very root of these words and this would help us understand the differences in the use of the terms. However, as we shall see shortly, this distinction is not evident in the way the terms are used in policy and daily discourse or academic writing in South Africa.

Before turning to how these terms are used internationally, I want briefly to explore the third term that is linked to the above, namely the term 'profession'. Professions are often separated from occupations and the institutions that offer and certify the qualifications which provide access to professional status, and are used to guard this boundary. But what is a profession, and what is a professional, and in what ways do these differ from occupations?

If one examines the etymology of 'profession', this can be traced back to the Latin *professio* which means a public declaration. The term 'profession' is used originally in the French language to refer to the declaration someone makes when they enter the priesthood and it is still used in this sense in some churches. Over time however the term became associated with certain occupations that also professed or declared their expertise. The people who professed certain expertise formed associations that regulated what expertise was required and who could declare it. There is an extensive field of study that tries to unpack exactly why these occupations are regarded as professions and others not – classically this has related to the degree of autonomy and judgement required, the extent to which they are self-regulated, the ethical underpinning, whether one is self-employed or waged, and the level of complexity of the task or the degree of knowledge required (Adams, 2015; Hall, 1979).

A common more recent approach to defining a professional is whether a university level education is required. I cannot go into this here in detail, but suffice to say that whatever angle you take on the question of how professions are defined, there are more exceptions than rules. Essentially these are categories of occupation that have mobilised over time, social and political power to entrench that status and secure the group's interests. The way this works in different societies varies greatly and has changed over time, with the nature of the work and who does the work affecting this status. Just by example, before the job of secretary was done by women, it was regarded as a high status and professional position (there are remnants of this in company secretaries or secretary generals of organisations) but as the profession became feminised and technology changed, so it lost its status as a profession. Similar things have happened more recently in banking where high status positions like bank managers are no longer professions because computer algorithms have replaced the judgements that were needed in the past. The term 'professional' is often associated with university-level qualifications and is a space that is jealously guarded by universities and professions. However, it is not always the case, as we have examples in our own [South African] history where professionals have been trained outside the university system. Engineering, teaching and some of the health sciences have at times been taught in colleges and continue to be taught outside of universities in many countries.

While certain types of occupations are labelled as professions, the idea of acting or being professional can be applied much more widely (Atkins & Tummons, 2017). This suggests forms of behaviour supposedly associated with professionals, but which can be noted in the way people conduct themselves in almost any occupation. This is a normative understanding that denotes care for others, quality of work, ethics, and expertise amongst others. This use of the term further complicates our task, because we know many professionals who don't act professionally and many people who are not classically in occupations that are called professional.

To sum up, the origins and definitions of the key terms we are exploring do suggest that there could be differences, but the differences in meaning are not reflected in the way we use them in South Africa. It therefore does not help to clarify the question at this point. A different way of looking at this is to examine whether similar distinctions exist in other places.

INTERNATIONAL USE

A recent paper produced by CEDEFOP makes two relevant points for our consideration. Firstly, it makes the point that vocational education is the most heterogeneous part of the education system because it takes place at all levels and in many settings, and is therefore difficult to define. Secondly, it defines vocational education as '...education and training which aims to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in particular occupations or more broadly in the labour market' (CEDEFOP, 2014a: 292). As can be seen, it views vocational education as being linked to occupations. I could list numerous variations of this from all over the world. The definitions are usually very broad, and generally refer to all work-oriented education and training as vocational education.

Generally speaking the dominant international usage is that qualifications within the VET system are referred to as vocational qualifications⁶. However, there are instances where the term 'occupational qualifications' is used as part of the vocational education system and the term is used in many legal or human resource contexts to denote the qualification needed to practice a specific occupation. For example in employment law in the United States of America (US), Canada and the United Kingdom (UK), a *bona fide occupational qualification* (BFOQ) (US) or *bona fide occupational requirement* (BFOR) (Canada) or genuine *occupational qualification* (GOQ) (UK) is a quality or an attribute that employers are allowed to consider when making decisions on the hiring and retention of employees. In the UK, vocational qualifications refer to work-related qualifications. They are designed to enable the learner to acquire knowledge and skills that are required by the national occupational standards (NOS) to be able to perform a particular job. This definition is almost identical to the South African definition of an occupational qualification. In the non-Anglophone world there are other terms which do not always easily translate.

While the formal and policy definitions suggest that these terms are used interchangeably across contexts and thus a difference cannot be described, the CEDEFOP (2017) report makes an important distinction between (1) the National Policy Definition of VET, (2) the National Policy Conception of VET, (3) the public understanding of VET and (4) the VET system. The definition of VET is to be found in the official policy documents, but the conception of VET amongst policy makers may be quite different. So for example the definition may be broad, multi-level and include multiple sites of delivery across the public and private sectors, yet the conception of VET amongst policy makers may be much more specific and be imbued with contextual understandings that may be different to the official definitions. For example, we may formally define the VET system to include any occupation-focused qualifications or programmes regardless of where they are delivered, but when we delve into the conceptions held by our policy makers there may be much more specific understandings that we are excluding those occupations called professions, that we are thinking primarily about the public system, and that we don't include agriculture, nursing, police, State Owned Enterprise (SOE) training academies and other institutions, in this conception. Furthermore, the public conception may be quite different and be rooted in preconceived historical ideas and prejudices that are both removed from the policy definitions and the policy makers' conceptions. The actual system may look entirely different to all of the above.

To illustrate this point and to highlight some commonalities with contexts elsewhere, let me reflect on an online discussion I initiated in preparation for this SAQA Chairperson's Lecture on the UNEVOC TVET Forum⁷. I simply asked whether any other countries draw a distinction between vocational and occupational qualifications. I had responses from colleagues from the UK, Australia, Scotland, Egypt, Uganda, Germany, Pakistan, the US, France and South Africa. The only people who understood what I was asking were the South Africans. But having said that, in the ensuing discussion certain differences did emerge that began resonating, despite differences in terminology.

6 See for example <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=TVETipedia+Glossary+A-Z&filt=all&id=541>, accessed 5 February 2018.

7 UNESCO's UNEVOC International Centre is one of seven institutes and centres that work in the field of education. It is responsible for connecting UNESCO Member States across the world, to develop TVET.

Some countries have a distinction between vocational and technical, others distinguish between education and training (the latter taking place in industry), yet others distinguish between how broad or narrow the preparation (or how big the job family) is. So while there wasn't uniform terminology being used, a number of countries have similar tensions. The two critical tensions were related to where the primary delivery of the *qualification was located* (education institution *versus* workplace) and *how specific* the link was, between a job and the qualification.

The South African responses to my question were quite consistent and pointed to the specific context and its history. It is this that I want to turn to now.

SOUTH AFRICA'S TERMINOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to understand whether there is a difference between the two terms in South African usage we need to understand how this terminology emerged over time. A full history is not possible here, but the current problematic can be understood in the heterogeneity of the vocational education system in South Africa and the particular traditions that emerged over time.

One strand of the vocational system has been the particular development of an apprenticeship system for certain occupations that have been referred to as the trades. This system is deeply imbricated with the particular history of mineral extraction and associated industrialisation, and developed over time into something akin to a dual system where indentured apprentices would train to become artisans through a combination of workplace learning, and blocks of time for learning theory in colleges. I have discussed this history and its race and gender dimensions elsewhere (Wedekind, 2018). Over time this technical education model incorporated some other occupations in such fields as hair and beauty and hospitality with associated apprenticeships, but also fields like secretarial studies without apprenticeships. Technical colleges had become broader, some taking on higher level programmes and becoming Technikons and others broadening their offerings to include non-technical subjects.

The apprenticeship system is highly dependent on having employers willing to take on apprentices. While the state and its various state-owned enterprises, alongside mining, dominated the economy this was not a problem. The state took on more apprentices than it needed, and the private sector took the spill-over. When the economy began its serious decline and the ideology of neoliberalism began infiltrating South Africa, this system went into serious decline (Wedekind, 2013). In order to survive, the educational institutions had to decouple their programmes from the apprenticeship system, and it became possible to do courses at colleges without being an indentured apprentice.

But colleges were not the only part of the vocational system. Technikons provided diplomas for mid-level skills and universities offered professional qualifications, often overlapping with specialist colleges and Technikons in sectors such as education, nursing and engineering. And companies did a lot of in-house training. There was also a relatively small but still significant part of the schooling system that was vocational – a technical strand that enabled school students

to do technical subjects that were the same as parts of theory taught in colleges, with practical components instead of the workplace experience, work-oriented subjects in the general curriculum, and a practical work related curriculum in the schools catering for learners with special needs and disabilities. Pathways between all these overlapping sites of delivery were blocked or unclear.

Two key interventions in the new democratic South Africa have shaped this system. Firstly, the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995) which gave rise to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), was an ambitious attempt to map all of the education and training provision (vocational and general/ foundational/ basic) onto one framework. Secondly, despite early policy intentions to have an integrated system, the governance and funding of the system under the SAQA Act was divided between the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Labour (DoL), and within the DoE, between branches linked to what were then referred to as the different 'bands' on the NQF. Following a review of the NQF and the promulgation of the NQF Act No. 67 of 2008, the DoE was split into the Departments of Basic Education (DBE), and Higher Education and Training (DHET). Post-School Education and Training (PSET) was integrated under the DHET. This is the perennial tension when trying to govern. If you create the structures, they develop lives of their own.

Which brings us slowly back to the question. At the heart of the distinction between vocational and occupational qualifications lies different conceptions of what a vocational system should look like and different emphases related to the purposes of qualifications. On the one hand you had a Department of Education (DoE) which had inherited the pre-democracy education organisations with all the competing logics that came with them, but centrally framed by a schooling conception of education. Within the DoE the major priority was sorting out schooling, by integrating the departments, dealing with the massive increases in enrolments and the problem of dropouts and failures at the exiting end of the system. Initially the colleges were ignored, then they were merged, and eventually they became seen as a solution to a range of issues affecting other parts of the system.

The introduction of the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) realised the policy intention of creating a parallel vocational stream in FET, loosely imitating similar systems in the UK, Europe and Australasia. It was presented as a replacement for the NATED curriculum, but was in fact a completely different model. The NATED curriculum had been designed around an apprenticeship. The NCV was conceptualised as a vocational secondary school programme, with no requirement for work placement. The practical component should be taught in the college. In presenting the qualification, the DoE argued that it was a broad "preparation for the world of work", equivalent to a school leaving certificate. In essence, the qualification was still one step away from qualifying someone for a specific job, but would provide the basis for entry into an apprenticeship or further training or other forms of experiential learning. The aim was to have a massified vocational system with school equivalent exit qualifications.

On the other side you had the Department of Labour (DoL), with many comrades from the unions but also working closely with employers, who were interested in a vocational system that provided skills training geared to the needs of the economy, improving the prospects for workers and doing so through modular competence modules called unit standards that would lead to qualifications. The DoL was interested in providing pathways for people already in work, as well as qualifications that would make people work-ready. The gold standard was a revitalised modern apprenticeship system rebranded as a learnership, which was more flexible and less onerous on employers, than were apprenticeships. The problem was that colleges were doing something quite different and weren't able to offer these new courses being championed by the DoL and the SETAs, and so a parallel provision system emerged with thousands of training providers offering unit standards-based courses.

Despite attempts to resolve these differences through the creation of the DHET, the institutional logics and their educational rationales have remained in the system. The term 'vocational qualifications' has become associated with the original DoE conception of institutionally based qualifications while occupational qualifications became the domain of the SETAs, and now of the QCTO.

And then further to complicate matters, as the various components linked to the DHET tried to resolve, indirectly, this historical distinction, the DBE decided to reform fundamentally, its schooling curriculum and essentially reactivate the dormant components of its technical and special needs strands of the vocational system. This has significant implications for the institution based vocational qualifications as some of what the DBE proposes is a direct duplication.

TAKING STOCK

At this point it is useful to summarise where we have arrived at in terms of addressing the questions – is there a difference, and does it make a difference?

Firstly, is there a difference between occupational and vocational qualifications?

We have established that yes, there are subtle distinctions in the etymology of the two words that might suggest slightly different foci. If we look at the difference in meaning, 'occupational' is possibly a more neutral descriptive term that describes all work, whilst 'vocational' carries a value and identity association. However, this is not the way the terms are used in South Africa and not really how they are used in other parts of the world.

We have also seen that internationally, the two terms are used at times interchangeably, sometimes with differences that are distinct from ours, and at other times in combinations with other words that are similar to how we use them in South Africa. So from this we can say, yes and no. It depends.

We also know from our history that the two terms have evolved in the post-school landscape to signal different things, primarily because of the different institutional logics that lie behind them,

but also because of a differing educational purpose. A vocational qualification is one that is offered in a college, and is thus school-like, while an occupational qualification is workplace directed, includes a workplace component and should lead to a labour market outcome. But there are other differences that are expressed too, such as that a vocational qualification is broad and prepares people for a wide array of related occupations while occupational qualifications are narrow and prepare people for specific jobs. The DBE distinction is framed quite differently, and seems to be underpinned by its own history of technical education and special needs education.

So to conclude on the first question, yes there is a difference not in any international or even in a policy definition sense, but in the policy conception sense. People in the system know what the difference is.

The more interesting question then is whether it makes a difference? And whether it should make a difference? It is to this that I wish to turn in the final section.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCES

We sit at a moment when it is worth taking stock of what we are trying to do with our vocational system [in South Africa] as a whole. There are important differences that we should be debating about what our entire vocational and skills system should look like.

The differences between the three conceptions of the qualifications in the VET System are partly about power, control, bureaucracy and personalities, but there are also important conceptual issues to clarify. We get distracted by some of the superficial issues linked to the naming and controlling of qualifications. So let's set aside the names for a moment and ask what the purpose is?

The CEDEFOP (2017) definition of a VET system is useful for purposes of this discussion. It refers to the entire system as the vocational education system – everything in the educational system that prepares people for work regardless of education and training level or where that education and training takes place. Understanding work is itself no easy task. Increasingly we are aware that work is not only about formal employment. There is much focus on entrepreneurs, but this too is very limited. As the economist Kate Raworth points out, we need to move away from thinking about work as only the market, but also include the state, the domestic sphere and 'the commons' (Raworth, 2017). When a rural woman is working in the fields providing food for her family and she participates in a training programme around water harvesting, this is vocational education.

Besides taking on board a wider understanding about the spheres of work, we also need to recognise that work is changing very rapidly and traditional opportunities for work are disappearing. Given the multiple spaces for work, the changing nature of work, and the diverse types of work we would expect that the forms vocational education takes would vary quite a lot. For some types of work you may need to know a lot in depth, others may require breadth, some might need a broad understanding of an occupational field which narrows as you specialise, while in other cases you

might start as a specialist and become more generalist. Some jobs require practical skills that become routinised, others require a basic grasp of easy-to-use tools. This speaks to the very passionate debates about whether qualifications must be offered in the workplace, must have a workplace-based component, or can be taught about workplaces.

There is evidence to suggest that qualifications with a workplace component are more likely to lead to employment, have greater alignment with employer needs and are more responsive. But this is not universally true for every occupation, and in some cases the workplaces simply are not there. It should not therefore be the defining feature of a qualification that it leads to work. In some cases, like law for example, the workplace learning might follow after a qualification. In other cases it may of necessity be integrated. If we start from the basis of what needs to be learned, and then work out where it can most effectively be learned, we might find that qualifications vary greatly from entirely classroom and workshop based to entirely workplace based and every combination in between. This pragmatic approach may well be a little messier, but it is more likely to lead to qualifications that are designed to serve the purpose of accessing work.

The other question that does need to be debated, is how broadly the occupational set should be defined. This is an important difference to talk about, and is widely discussed internationally. The findings from Australian research and the German and Swiss systems is that we should be training people for broader sets of jobs rather than specific jobs (Moodie, Fredman, Bexley, & Wheelahan, 2013; Wheelahan & Moodie, 2018). This increases the chances of finding work and also of retraining if certain work disappears.

My own research as part of the Labour Market Intelligence Partnership⁸ has highlighted the critical role of the institutionalisation of qualifications (Wedekind & Mutereko, 2016). By institutionalisation I refer not to the common conception of qualifications being taught in education and training institutions, but rather the degree to which the qualification itself becomes an institution that is collectively understood as the route to a particular occupation. This can be done through regulation (for example, you may not do surgery on someone without a MBChB qualification), but can also be understood in a more values sense or as a cultural understanding. In some of our case studies we found that it wasn't so much what was taught, as to *where* you had achieved your qualification, that mattered, or, it didn't matter what the (NQF) level was because everyone in the industry knew this was a key starting point. Working out not only what the rules and regulations are, but also how society understands qualifications and what they signal, is key to understanding how the learning pathways work (and why they don't work in many cases). The institutional perspective also suggests a messier more organic approach to the development of the vocational landscape, but that is precisely how these processes work in practice.

⁸ The Labour Market Intelligence Partnership between the DHET and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in South Africa supports the Labour Market Intelligence Project (LMIP), which has been designed for research and reporting on skills demands and supply in the country.

Finally, we could have a conception of a vocational system that is not only about pathways to work. There are many people who would like to see a vocational education and training system providing second chance opportunities for completing schooling, for accessing Higher Education, or simply for 'warehousing' young people for a while to keep them off the streets and out of the labour market until they are more ready to enter it. All of these purposes are legitimate and understandable depending on your perspective, but I would argue that these roles are not the function of a vocational education system or the purpose of occupational qualifications. It is possible for educational institutions to play different roles, and offer different programmes.

However, the danger is, and our past mistake was, that we thought single qualifications could achieve multiple purposes. This is a danger because that provides mixed messages to the students and the potential employers as to what qualifications the students are doing. If you are offering second chance or access opportunities, or wish to keep people off the streets, then be clear what the primary purpose is, of what is on offer.

The implication is that it might be better to have subsystems of the education system that focus on their remit and do it well: Schools that give everyone a good general education where people have decent levels of literacy, numeracy and the foundations for a range of pathways; a vocational system that maps clearly onto the messy changing world of work in its broadest sense; a Higher Education sector that produces both specialists and generalists; and an Adult and Continuing sector that intersects with all of the above.

If that underpins the differences in the qualifications, then we can make a real difference in society. Distinguishing between vocational and occupational qualifications based on the current historical pathways of development makes little sense. But trying to design the perfect system again is also an impossible dream. I would argue that we need to build the new vocational system on the parts that already work, and progressively expand these in an integrated but heterogenous way.

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Mr Samuels has organised and participated in many national and international seminars and conferences where he has delivered various papers *inter alia* on National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), the generation of qualifications and standards, quality assurance in education and training, the integration of education and training, human rights and the NQF, and NQFs in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, on the African continent, and globally. Recently he served as the chairperson of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Drafting Team for the Addis Convention, a document on the recognition of foreign qualifications that allows for the movement of learners, academics and workers across borders, that was adopted by 54 African States in December 2014. He served as an Expert on the UNESCO Panel of Experts for development of the Global Convention for the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education and for Level Descriptors.

Mr Samuels serves on the councils of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, the National Skills Authority (NSA), and the board of SAQA. He has served on various committees and task teams including those for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Worker Education, and others. He is the Deputy Chairperson of the UWC Alumni Association in the Gauteng province.

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10 The national implementation plan for the White Paper Post School Education and Training (PSET).

11 The highest authority structure of the Council on Higher Education.

Acronyms

BFOQ	Bona Fide Occupational Qualification
BFOR	Bona Fide Occupational Requirement
CEDEFOP	European Union Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CACE	Centre for Adult and Continuing Education
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DUT	Durban University of Technology
FET	Further Education and Training
GOQ	Genuine Occupational Qualification
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	National Certificate: Vocational
NOS	National Occupational Standard
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OFO	Organising Framework for Occupations
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNEVOC	UNESCO International Centre for developing TVET
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
US	United States of America

UWC	University of the Western Cape
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University



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