

**2017 DHET Research Colloquium**  
**Minister's Speech**

**EVALUATION STUDY INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

Programme Director, Chairperson of the session, Dr Sishi, Mr Qonde, the Director-General of the Department, Mr Jens Bjornavold, Dr James Keevy, CEO of the Joint Education Trust (JET), Chairpersons of the Boards and CEO's of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and Umalusi, CEOs of SETAs, CEO of Universities South Africa (USAf), CEOs and Principals of TVET and Community Education and Training Colleges, Vice-chancellors of Universities, Officials of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the Departments of Basic Education and of Higher Education and Training, esteemed ladies and gentlemen.

I welcome you to this research Colloquium in which, for the next two days, we are going to listen to, discuss, and provide final input into this very extensive evaluation research into the implementation of the NQF Act, from 2008 to 2016.

At a *Legotla* of the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) of South Africa in April 2015, the Deputy President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa asked where South Africa as a country wanted to be in 20 years' and what do South Africans hope to achieve? He encouraged the nation to have "wild dreams", and emphasized that "young people must have access to programmes and opportunities".

The development of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) has been built on a long developmental trajectory dating back to the proposals in the African National Congress (ANC) policy document for a post-apartheid education

and training system, and the proposals from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in the late 1980's.

South Africa needed to build a credible, and sustainable education and training system, which would remove the divisions created by 17 different education and training departments, which were established to implement the Apartheid era education and training system. What finally emerged, as Dr Sishi has told us, was a vision of a NQF system which would be transformational, and become one of the key mechanisms for redress, skills development, personal, and community development through the teaching and learning of quality and credible qualifications.

This mechanism would remove barriers to access, mobility and enable people to embark on career pathways and lifelong learning pathways. To do this we needed to publish legislation and policies to guide what became known as the NQF and to establish credible and accountable organisations to implement the NQF Act. This Act would establish a NQF which would be responsive to labour market intelligence, sustainable development goals and itself become a driver of change on education and training systems. At the time of the promulgation of the then SAQA Act in 1995, I was the Chairperson of the Education Portfolio Committee in Parliament, and was deeply involved in steering the process towards the promulgation of the SAQA Act, which was the first piece of legislation to be promulgated in after our democracy was achieved in 1994.

Now, as Minister of Higher Education and Training, I have overall executive responsibility for the NQF, for SAQA and the three Quality Councils (QCs), and for all matters related to the NQF as set out in the NQF Act.

The Post-school education and training (PSET) system is in the midst of a transformation "tsunami", of which the NQF is part. I **have** to be concerned about how the South African NQF is positioned in the overall PSET plan, and how the NQF will continue to matter. This evaluation research into the implementation of the NQF Act, therefore, is timeous and necessary at this critical juncture of planning the PSET system.

This research is contextualized within a current critical global discourse about National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), as the extensive literature review in this research report signifies. Questions are being asked whether and how NQFs have a role to play in a world where change is constant and trends emerge which shape the operational, transactional and contextual elements of the systems.

This research project, which has been a joint venture between the DPME and ourselves as DHET, is part of our journey on which we listen, contemplate and grow our practices in the NQF space.

Disparity between beneficiaries of education and training in South Africa is still evident, mainly because we are still dealing with the legacy of an Apartheid-driven education and training system. The effects of this disparity are still evident and experienced by many black people especially in the over-35 age group. Schools, TVET colleges and Universities of Technology and Universities which were once part of the homelands, self-governing territories, and Black, Colored and Indian Departments pre-1994, still have disparity legacy issues to deal with, such as financial well-being, governance, and resources. We view the NQF as a mechanism, through especially articulation and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), open education resources and lifelong learning opportunities to close the disparity gaps.

The erstwhile SAQA Act, of 1995 expressed these earlier policy directives of the ANC and the labour movement, and the development and implementation of the NQF became the core component of the work of SAQA.

So, this evaluation research report and this colloquium provides us with the opportunity now to look through a critical lens at the NQF and evaluate to what extent the dreams we had for the NQF as an enabling mechanism have been realized, and what we need to do to ensure the NQF remains one of our key tools to drive social inclusion, equity, transformation and redress.

I recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done. The PSET system in South Africa is characterised by current conceptual and organizational incongruities, in particular:

- o Lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications;
- o Inadequate response to the varied needs of the current socio-economic context;
- o Lack of definition and order in learner progression routes and articulation arrangements;
- o Incorrectly viewing vocational education as human capital learning or instrumental learning focused on the acquisition of a relatively narrow band of employment-related or job-specific skills and competencies;
- o Inadequate building of coherence between the NQF sub-frameworks; and
- o The absence of robust articulation arrangements between the different programme and institutional types, and mainstreamed implementation of RPL across our system.

The South African NQF is a “living NQF”, which has to be dynamic and responsive to current changes in education and training. **Living NQFs** enable the value systems of lifelong learning, education for democracy and social justice, and active, innovative participation in the economy to be realized by participants in the education and training system. Living NQFs are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The South African NQF comprises 10 levels, starting at NQF level 1 which is the level of schooling at grade 9, or the exit level of adult basic education and training, and continues to NQF level 10 (the PhD level). In the **post-school system**, the NQF applies across all the levels, from 1 to 10. It comprises qualifications and part qualifications which range in scope, purpose and range. These qualifications “relate”

to one another by virtue of their design, their learning outcomes and the level descriptors, which are building blocks of a NQF.

I am intrigued that we can register qualifications for artisans, for hairdressers, chefs, secretaries, hotel receptionists and tourist guides, and sports coaches to name a few, which are offered in our public and private colleges and community education and training colleges; while our NQF also comprises higher certificates, diplomas, and degrees right up to doctoral degrees offered in our universities. These are all connected through mechanisms which allow for articulation and recognition of prior learning, access and lifelong learning across a range of institutional types and models of teaching, learning and assessment. This is part of the dynamism of the South African NQF, which is an integrated NQF.

At the time that the South African NQF was first being reviewed, Nkomo (2000: 14) suggested that “We need systemic change, (in education and training); not just curriculum or pedagogic change; we need a new driving vision for our system, not just a new paradigm for curriculum design and delivery in the classroom”. He also suggested that we needed a new vision for our education and training system. The policy challenge was to find an acceptable mechanism for managing educational transition effectively.

This is one of the reasons that it is the right “season” now to take a step back, to research and reflect on the findings of the evaluation of the implementation of the NQF so that we ensure the NQF grows in ways that benefit all of us.

A broad operating environment is acknowledged as the NQF operates in a variety of contexts, such as education and training policy environments, provider contexts, quality assurance bodies, learner communities, workplaces and non-profit organizations. I contend that central factors in successful NQF implementation include the establishment of a quality culture and quality assurance.

NQFs are not built and do not function in a simple or linear environment. The transactional environment comprises a number of actors, such as communities, shareholders, creditors, customers, suppliers, associations, unions, competitors. Some of these could also be legislated relationships, such as the relationship between SAQA and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), or SAQA and the three QCs. The **shareholders** I suggest are the learners, including those who have participated in non-formal and informal learning and adult basic education offerings. The quality assurance bodies are also shareholders, as are the partners in development and implementation.

The contextual environment and relationships comprise political, economic, ecological, technological, and socio-cultural forces. It is plausible that NQFs could have a value-add role to support economic growth and sustainable development by developing and implementing enabling policies such as those for RPL, articulation and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).

Using the institutional delivery mechanisms, previously untapped 'pipelines' of knowledgeable and skilled people could become economically active and employed in a shorter space of time, and, it is suggested, at a considerably lower cost to a Fiscus, through RPL and Articulation. People with scarce and critical skills and knowledge, acquired through non-formal, informal and experiential on-the-job learning would be available for a labour market with ever-changing skills needs.

Economic growth imperatives are forcing countries to explore ways to provide the skilled people to work and become part of the economic growth solution, and it is possible that NQFs provide one of the credible routes to resolve some of these challenges.

The NQF Act exerts influence on a system that is complex, involves multiple institutions, that are interdependent, processes that are intertwined and deals with intangible concepts such as quality. Given the nature and role of the NQF, it's hard therefore to **attribute** any changes brought about by the Act to the outcomes and impacts emerging from this Evaluation research. Rather, this evaluation emphasises the **contribution** of the NQF Act to improvements in the outcomes.

An important question therefore, is; how do we transition the NQF from its current state to a new state, where it continues to matter for lifelong learning and pertinent and relevant skills development?

It is not possible to speak about qualifications frameworks without putting them into a broader context which includes the trends that trigger changes in labour markets, education and training, economies, and society in general. What can qualifications and qualifications frameworks contribute in future to socio-economic development, and community development and *vice versa*.

Scholars in teaching and learning and NQFs are clear that formal education is not equipped well enough anymore to fulfill the growth in expectations and learning and skills development needs of individuals and communities in the rapidly changing global society and changing economies.

For example, there is a growing demand by adults and young people for recognition, validation and formal awards for the knowledge, skills and competences they have acquired in a variety of learning contexts, including non-formal and informal learning environments.

Fenwick (2010) stated that the critical problem lies in mistaking learning as a single object, when in fact it is enacted as multiple objects, as very different things in different logics and practice. Traditional forms of education which have been based on formal schooling, college and university education resulting in qualifications

awarded for these learning programmes, have discounted the value of learning acquired by millions of people through formal and informal workplaces, in communities, and the informal education sector.

How should a NQF adapt and incorporate the new power of technology-driven learning for the next generation? The transformation of the education and training system is being driven by the digital revolution.

One of the key goals for sustainable development in the UNESCO 2030 agenda is that which aims *to ensure the quality of education and training, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. This is the ambition set for the next 15 years. An important question to consider is that of **how education and training qualifications frameworks** can contribute to achieving these objectives.

Globally NQFs are now being seen as “policy tools for reform, and at improving transparency and recognition.

In closing, then this report provides the findings and recommendations of the implementation evaluation of the NQF Act, which was jointly commissioned by DPME and DHET.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an independent and objective examination of the implementation of the NQF Act relative to its goal(s) and objectives in the period of review, including its associated policies and regulations. The evaluation also seeks to identify the successes and challenges in the implementation of the Act and offer recommendations regarding improvements to the implementation of Act in the future.

So I welcome you to this research colloquium, and trust that you will engage honestly with the report, its findings and recommendations, and will be courageous enough to acknowledge the significant strides we have made, where these are



evident, but also brave enough to call for change where this will improve education and training opportunities for all South Africans. I ask you to continue to ensure that the South African NQF, which was designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large, actually does this, through your agency over the next two days.