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African Continental Qualifications Framework ACQF MAPPING STUDY

Country Report Working Paper

SOUTH AFRICA

SIFA

Skills for Youth Employability Programme

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The reports of this collection are:

- **Reports on countries' qualifications frameworks:** Angola, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Togo
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Acronyms

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
APPETD	Association of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Network
AUC	African Union Commission
BMZ	Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CET	Community Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETP	Education and Training Providers
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
GIZ	<i>Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
HE	Higher Education
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SANQF	South African NQF
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAQAN	Southern African Quality Assurance Network
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	School Governing Body
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Introduction on the ACQF Mapping Study

Policy context of this mapping study

This country report forms an integral part of the *Mapping Study on the state-of-play and dynamics of qualifications frameworks in Africa*, which lays the updated evidence foundation for development of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). The purpose of this report is to provide an updated overview - not an evaluation - of policies, practices and instruments related with qualifications frameworks in Africa.

The African Union Commission (AUC) initiated the ACQF development process in September 2019 working in partnership with the European Union (EU), *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF) over a period of 2.5 years (2019-2022). The ACQF-development activities are part of the African Union (AU)-EU project “Skills for Youth Employability”, which supports a holistic process building on evidence and analysis; AUC political leadership and consultation of African stakeholders (national, regional and continental); and awareness raising and capacity development of African stakeholders.

The main planned output of the project by mid-2022 is the ACQF policy and technical document and action plan technically validated for decision making by the relevant organs of the AU.

The intermediate project outputs planned for 2019-2022 are:

- ACQF Mapping study (by mid-2020)
- ACQF Feasibility study (by mid-2021)

Other key outputs:

- Stakeholder consultation workshops throughout the process (2019-2022)
- Awareness raising and capacity development actions (2020-2022)
- Website to support ACQF development and information sharing
- ACQF related policy and technical information for STC-EST meetings

ACQF Mapping Study: brief overview of the scope and methodology

The ACQF mapping study aims to chart a comprehensive, specific and updated analysis of where Africa stands in respect to qualifications frameworks development, establishment, operationalisation and revision. The scope of the study is wide in terms of explored thematic domains; and inclusive, as it considers the broad range of countries’ dynamics and progression stages in developing and establishing qualifications frameworks.

The mapping study builds on a combination of sources of information and data:

- a) Desk research: collection and analysis of sources, including policy-legislative framework; methodology sources; qualifications websites, registers and catalogues; statistical data; analyses and studies.
- b) Online survey: conducted between beginning of November 2019 and mid-January 2020; a second round was conducted in May 2020. Responses were received from 33 countries.
- c) Technical visits to a group of ten countries and three Regional Economic Communities (RECs): carried out by a team of experts, in the period from mid-December 2019 to mid-March 2020.

Countries included in the technical visits: Angola, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Togo. Cabo Verde was included in March 2020, but due to the Coronavirus Pandemic the research did not include a country visit, and was based on online meetings, a presentation of the NQF and extensive desk research. Three Regional Economic Communities (RECs) contacted: EAC, ECOWAS and SADC.

Main reports of the mapping study

- Final comprehensive report, encompassing the full set of findings from the continental stocktaking and the thematic analyses on qualifications frameworks developments in Africa. Finalisation: September 2020.
- Synthetic report and infographics focused on key findings. Period: September 2020.

Thematic analyses contributing to the comprehensive mapping study

- Report of continental-wide survey on developments of qualifications frameworks encompassing all AU Member States (AU MS) and RECs
- Report of analysis of qualifications
- Country reports (11 countries) and REC reports (3 RECs)

The field work for this mapping report was conducted in February 2020. It was based on interviews and meetings with the representatives of the relevant institutions: Association of Private Providers of Education Training and Development (APPETD), Council on Higher Education (CHE), Department of Basic Education (DBE), Independent Examinations Board (IEB), National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), Quality Council for Trade & Occupations (QCTO), South African Council for Educators (SACE) and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The report underwent the following rounds of review: i) by the external reviewer, Ms Andrea Bateman, in May 2020. ii) by the ACQF project expert, Ms Eduarda Castel-Branco, in July 2020, iii) by SAQA, in September 2020. The ACQF project expresses recognition to SAQA for the excellent cooperation in leading the third round of review, in consultation with the relevant institutions. The constructive dialogue with SAQA during the last round of review contributed to strengthen information-sharing on the newest developments of the South African NQF and on cooperation with the ACQF process.

The detailed list of participants in meetings and debates organised for this study is not provided in this version of the report.

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1. Executive Summary of the South African NQF

The South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) has been in place for 22 years as of June 2020. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is the custodian of the SANQF and was tasked, by the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995, with the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework. The National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 officially repealed the SAQA Act and introduced innovative changes to the SANQF, including the establishment of three NQF Sub-Frameworks, namely:

- General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) occupying NQF Levels 1 to 4
- Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) occupying NQF Levels 5 to 10
- Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) occupying NQF Levels 1 to 8.

The SANQF is a comprehensive and integrated one, consisting of ten levels and spanning basic education, TVET, trades and occupations and higher education. The main purpose of the SANQF is to allow for access, redress, articulation and progression, quality and transparency within and across all spheres of education, training, development as well as the workplace. It is also the principle instrument for recognition. The objectives of the SANQF, designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large, are to:

- Create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- Enhance the quality of education and training; and
- Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

SAQA jointly works towards these objectives with the three Quality Councils (QCs) whose responsibility it is to carry out quality assurance and standards development within their respective Sub-Frameworks. Furthermore, SAQA is responsible for registering qualifications on the NQF once the qualifications meet the outlined in SAQA's policy and criteria for developing, registering and publishing qualifications on the NQF.

The following legislation supports the implementation of the NQF:

- General and Further Education And Training Quality Assurance Amendment Act 50 of 2008
- Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2016;
- Skills Development Act 97 of 1998;
- Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999;
- Adult Education and Training Act 52 of 2000;
- South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 as amended in 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2011;
- National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996 as amended in 1997, 1999, 2007, and 2011;
- Articulation Policy for the PSET system in South Africa (2017);
- Continuing Education and Training Act 16 of 2006; and
- Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Act 26 of 2010.

A number of policies have been developed by SAQA together with the three Quality Councils including:

- National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (as amended in 2019);
- Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF (as amended 2017);
- Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Appeal Policy (2018);
- Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Revocation Policy (2018);
- Addendum on Recognition of Qualifications of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2019);
- Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designations (2020);
- Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-Qualifications (2020);
- Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework (2014);
- Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework (2012) ;
- National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa (2017);
- Revised Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) Policy (2020);
- Policy for the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (2014); and
- Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (As revised in 2013).

Going forward, there is a focus by SAQA on further strengthening articulation pathways as well as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the simplification of the SANQF.

2. Introduction and context to country

2.1 General information

The Republic of South Africa is situated on the southernmost point of the African continent, bordered by Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The population of the country was estimated at 58 955 000 in 2019 (Lowe et al., 2020), with projections estimating growth to around 61 592 000 by 2030. Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) describes the country as having a youthful population (StatsSA, 2016), with the youth (18-34 years) making up almost a third of the population. The majority (66.4%) are urban dwellers, with the others residing in rural areas. Rapid urban migration is taking place across the country resulting in peripheral shack settlements in urban areas. These settlements often have little access to basic services (Global Inventory, 2017).

South Africa has nine provinces. Gauteng is the most populous province with 13.4 million residents recorded in the StatsSA 2016 Community Survey. Johannesburg (in Gauteng) is the centre of commerce. Pretoria is the executive capital of the country, while Cape Town and Bloemfontein are the legislative and judicial capitals respectively. Other major cities include Cape Town, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth which all have ports that are important for industry and commerce.

The country is governed as a multiparty republic since the abolition of apartheid in 1994, a system that entrenched racial segregation in almost every aspect of life for South Africans, including housing, education, and health. Apartheid led to high levels of poverty and inequality, particularly amongst the black African majority in the country. While access to basic services has improved under democratic rule, quality of these services is currently a mounting concern (StatsSA, 2016; Global Inventory, 2017).

South Africa has eleven official languages, including Sepedi (also known as Sesotho sa Leboa), Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu. Language varies across the different regions.

According to the Community Survey of 2016 (StatsSA, 2016), immigration (from South Africa to another country) numbers outweigh emigration (coming to South Africa from other countries) nationally. During the 2011 census, a total of 2 188 872 foreign-born persons resident in South Africa, decreased to 1 578 541 in the 2016 Community Survey. This decrease may be indicative of fear of disclosure of foreign origins due to marked levels of xenophobia. Chien and Kot (2012) found that the SADC region has the highest outbound mobility ratio worldwide (6%), with nearly half of the mobile students choosing to study in South Africa. At the time of publication of their paper, South Africa was home to 61 000 foreign students.

The World Bank Data Help Desk categorises South Africa as an upper middle-income economy (World Bank, 2019). The Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of upper middle-income economies is between United States Dollar (USD) 3 956 and USD 12 235 (World Bank, 2019). Recently, the economy has faltered, showing a 1.4% decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the last quarter of 2019. The economy is fairly diversified with key economic sectors including mining, agriculture and fisheries, vehicle manufacturing and assembly, food processing, clothing and textiles, telecommunication, energy, financial and business services, real estate, tourism, transportation, and wholesale and retail trade. According to StatsSA, the finance, real estate and business services sector increased by 2.7% and contributed 0.6% to GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2019.

3. Mapping the education and training system

The education system consists of primary, secondary and tertiary phases. From 1994, one Department of Education was responsible for both primary and secondary education, and for higher education (HE) and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) (Macha & Kadakia, 2017). The Department of Labour was responsible for skills development. Following the 2009 elections, the education portfolio was separated into two ministries, namely Basic Education and Higher Education and Training (Kgobe & Baatjes, 2014). Consequently, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) oversees primary and secondary education systems. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is responsible for post-schooling education and training, with a range of institutional types including public universities and private higher education institutions, TVET colleges (public and private), community education and training (CET) colleges, and adult education centres (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014). In addition, the oversight of trades and occupational qualifications shifted from the Department of labour to the DHET.

The division into two departments was intended to address inequality, under-provision and inadequate allocation of teaching and learning resources— as well as strengthening the integration of the system. This move is supported by the OECD (2017) argument that schooling systems have resource constraints and that optimal use of available resources is crucial. Each department is led by its own minister who sets national policy through norms and standards that are implemented in all nine provinces of South Africa. The strategic objective for dedicating one department to basic education was to improve the quality of teaching, perform regular assessments to track progress, improve the very critical Early Childhood Development (ECD) component, and also ensure that the effects of the system are focused on accountability towards quality of life, and building a prosperous and peaceful society (Department of Basic Education, 2010, 2016; Tibane, 2018).

The Constitution of South Africa gives all South Africans the right to basic education, and the government is obliged to make further education progressively accessible and available through reasonable measures (Tibane, 2018). A majority of public schools are no-fee schools, and post-schooling and university education is available and accessible to many poor African students through a government-funded scheme.

3.1 Primary and Secondary School

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) was established in 2009. As political head, the Minister sets policy through procedures, norms, and standards expected to be implemented across the sector (Department of Basic Education, 2016). There are approximately 25 000 schools in the country, with just under 2000 of these schools being private and independent schools. The DBE is continuously building new schools, some as innovative centres of excellence (Department of Basic Education, 2010; Macha & Kadakia, 2017; Tibane, 2018). The basic schooling system consists of three phases, namely foundation, intermediate and senior (Macha and Kadakia, 2017; OECD, 2008). Foundation phase covers grade R (also known as reception year) to grade three and is focused on home language, additional language, life skills, and mathematics, while the intermediate phase covers grades 4 to 6, with a broader range of subjects.

South African public schools are categorised according to a quintile system in order to ensure that those schools in the most disadvantaged and poor areas are prioritised in terms of financial resources. Schools fall into one of the quintiles based on the surrounding area's socioeconomic status, with the poorest schools being categorised as quintile 1 schools and quintile 5 schools being those that are within most advantaged or wealthiest communities (Ogbonnaya & Awuah, 2019).

The majority of primary and secondary schools are public, accounting for the largest number of enrolments, and coordinated and supported by educational districts and circuit offices under management of the provinces. Each school has a School Governing Body (SGB) responsible for its governance, and comprising members of the surrounding community, parents and teachers (Tibane, 2018).

Secondary schooling consists of six years, with grades 7 to 9 as the Senior Phase, and grades 10 to 12 as the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Schooling is compulsory to the end of the Senior Phase, and includes subjects such as mathematics, life orientation, arts and culture, economic and management sciences, and physical and life sciences, in addition to languages. FET phase provision offers a choice between an academic (general) or technical route in the schooling system, although learners who leave school at the end of grade 9 are also eligible for entry into TVET colleges.

Completion of grade 12 is determined nationally by performance on a standardised examination process, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), commonly known as matriculation. The three categories (Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree) of passing the NSC determine learners' differential access to further education and employment.

3.2 Relevant Stakeholders in the Basic Education Sector

A number of structures are role players in the Basic Education sector, including the following.

- **DBE:** The DBE has overall responsibility at national level.
- **SAQA:** SAQA registers qualifications on the NQF as recommended by Umalusi.
- **Provincial departments of basic education:** While the DBE is responsible for policymaking at a national level, provincial departments are responsible for implementation of basic education

and ECD within their respective provinces. Provincial departments have full responsibility for finance, management and administration of schools, with district officers being the main interface between the province and the schools (Tibane, 2018).

- **Department of Social Development (DSD):** The DSD funds a large percentage of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and is responsible for the regulation of these centres.
- **South African Council for Educators (SACE):** SACE is a statutory professional body for educators, and aims to promote the integrity of the teaching profession, administer professional development and endorse a code of ethics for all educators.
- **Umalusi:** Umalusi (a Zulu name meaning 'herder' or 'shepherd') is the Quality Council responsible for developing and maintaining the GFETQSF, and quality assures these qualifications.
- **Teacher unions:** Teacher organisations negotiate on behalf of their members for basic conditions of employment, rights of teachers and also participate in policy development in the basic education sector.
- **Student organisations:** Learner organisations also participate in negotiations regarding issues that affect them directly.
- While by far the biggest share of Basic Education provision lies with the State, there are also **independent assessment bodies** such as the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) that provide for around 10% of the Basic Education system.

3.3 Post-School Education and Training

Post School Education and Training refers the post-school system is understood as comprising all education and training provision for those who have completed school, those who did not complete their schooling, and those who never attended school (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was established in 2009, and governs post-school education and training, which encompasses public universities and private higher education institutions, TVET colleges (public and private), trades and occupational qualifications, community education and training (CET) colleges, and adult education centres. Among these, public universities are autonomous, statutory bodies, established by Acts of Parliament. After its establishment, the DHET assumed responsibility for skills training that was previously under governance of the Department of Labour, and coordinated by 21 sector education and training authorities (SETAs) tasked with ensuring that intermediate and high-level skills are developed among both workers and unemployed persons (Taylor and Shindler, 2016:5).

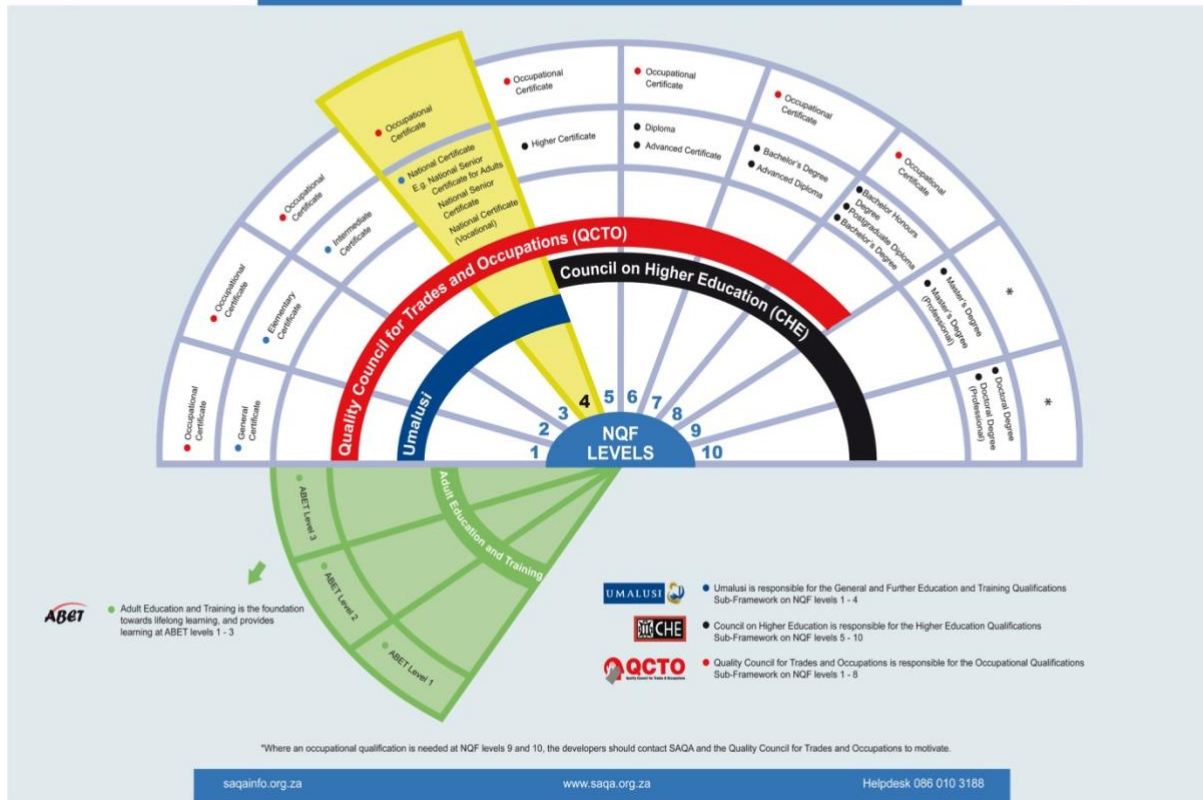


Figure 1. National Qualification Framework, ABET Levels and the National Senior Certificate
Source: South African Qualifications Authority (2020)

The National Development Plan (2010) envisions the country's development and growth driven by a capable state with a capable and skilled workforce to support national efforts at inclusive growth. The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2014) gives effect to this national goal, ensuring that young people in particular, and citizens in general especially those of the post-school system, should possess the necessary skills, expertise and knowledge that enables them to meet current labour market demands, needs of the economy and those of society broadly. Consequently, the White Paper talks about expansion and reconfiguration of the sector to respond to socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty and inequality, and to further address the cohorts of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

3.3.1 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

The public Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in South Africa has undergone substantial change since the dawn of democracy in 1994. Existing technical colleges were merged in 2002 into 50 large multi-campus institutions, offering newly developed curricula from 2007. Under the auspices of the DHET since 2009, and in response to the White Paper of 2014 (when they were renamed 'TVET colleges') colleges are increasingly encouraged to provide training that is responsive to need, particularly through partnerships, with collaborations with SETAs prioritised (Taylor & Shindler, 2016). The TVET sector thus offers vocational, occupational and artisan education and training (DHET, 2014; Tibane, 2018). Private colleges offer similar qualifications to those of the public TVET colleges, being national certificates or diplomas. However Ministerial approved programmes offered through public TVET colleges are government funded, unlike in the private colleges (Macha & Kadakia, 2017). The two main qualifications that are currently offered in the sector

are Report 191 National Technical Education programmes (commonly known as NATED) and the National Certificate (Vocational) both of which are quality assured by Umalusi.

Given the rising unemployment rate, which according to StatsSA (2019) stands at 29.2%, TVET is one of the strategic sites of education to address the country's economic and political stability (Macha & Kadakia, 2017).

3.3.2 Higher Education

Prior to 1994 the South African education system was characterised by inequality of provision, resourcing, access and quality. However, after the 1994 election, there was significant growth in the numbers of students accessing tertiary institutions, particularly universities and universities of technology.

Currently, the South African higher education policy framework makes provision for three institutional types:

- **Traditional universities** offer basic formative degrees such as Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc) at Level 7 of the NQF, as well as professional undergraduate degrees such as BSc Engineering (BSc Eng) and Bachelor of Medicine (MBChB) at NQF Level 8. At postgraduate level the universities offer honours degrees and a range of masters and doctoral degrees. Universities also offer a limited number of undergraduate diplomas and certificates as well as postgraduate diplomas and certificates;
- **Universities of technology** offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas and BTech degrees which serve as capping qualifications for diploma graduates, which are currently being phased out and being replaced with advance diplomas and postgraduate diplomas. Universities of Technology also offer a limited number of masters and doctoral programmes; and
- **Comprehensive universities** offer programmes typical of both universities and universities of technology.

In 1994, the higher education system comprised 21 public universities, 15 technikons, 120 colleges of education, 24 nursing and 11 agricultural colleges (HESA, 2011:9). In addition, currently the sector includes 99 private higher institutions offering certificates, diplomas and some degrees. Currently, the higher education system has 26 higher education institutions, comprising 20 universities and six universities of technology (Universities South Africa, 2020).

3.4 Relevant Stakeholders in the Post-School Education and Training Sector

3.4.1 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is mandated through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act of 2008, as amended in 2019, to advance the objectives of the NQF, oversee its further development and implementation, and coordinate the NQF Sub-Frameworks administered by the QCs. Its functions include developing and overseeing the implementation of the NQF policy suite, collaborating with international counterparts, maintaining the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), and conducting or commissioning investigations on issues of significance for the implementation and further development of the NQF. The recent NQF Amendment Act of 2019 updates the NQF Act and expands the mandate of SAQA but has not been promulgated yet.

3.4.2 Council on Higher Education (CHE)

The CHE is a statutory Quality Council that monitors and tracks trends in the post-schooling and higher education sector, advises the Minister, and further ensures and promotes quality in the higher education system. Additionally, CHE is mandated to audit higher education institutions, evaluate and accredit programmes offered, develop the HEQSF and set standards.

3.4.3 Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

The QCTO is a Quality Council mandated to design and develop occupational standards and qualifications and submit those to SAQA for registration on the NQF, ensure the quality of occupational standards and qualifications for the workplace, and liaise with the National Skills Authority on the adequacy, suitability, and quality of learning for the workplace.

3.4.4 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)

Among other things, the responsibility of SETAs is to strengthen the delivery of relevant priority skills to South Africa's labour market, with emphasis and focus on artisan training development, apprenticeships, and learnerships, in conjunction with TVET colleges and universities, particularly by providing for workplace readiness in students. SETAs are mandated by the Skills Development Act (1998) to implement national, sector and workplace strategies to improve skills in the workforce.

3.4.5 National Skills Authority (NSA)

The National Skills Authority is a statutory body that was first established in 1999 in terms of Chapter 2 of the Skills Development Act 1998. Responsibility for skills development currently falls under the Minister for Higher Education, Science and Technology (National Skills Authority, 2020). Furthermore, the NSA advises the Minister on Skills Development and liaise with SETAs in development of skills development strategies.

3.4.6 National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was established in terms of Act 56 of 1999 (National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 2020). The mission of NSFAS has three distinct elements which describe why NSFAS exists and its impact on the constituency:

- NSFAS exists to provide financial aid to eligible students at TVET colleges and public universities;
- NSFAS identifies eligible students, provides bursaries and collects past student loan repayments to replenish the funds available for future generations of students; and
- NSFAS supports access to, and success in, higher education and training for students from poor and working-class families who would otherwise not be able to afford to study.

4. Scope and structure of the NQF

4.1 Scope

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) was established in 1995 by the SAQA Act (No. 58 of 1995), to provide for the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Its mandate continues under the NQF Act No 67 of 2008, as amended by the NQF Amendment Act No 12 of 2019. The NQF Act provides for the registration and quality assurance of national education and training qualifications and part-qualifications, the recognition of professional bodies

and the registration of their professional designations, amongst other aspects of the system. According to the Global Inventory (2017), the NQF was established as an integrated system underpinned by a transformational agenda, in order to promote lifelong learning for all South Africans. Through this integrated and transformational system, the NQF can achieve its purpose of access, redress, articulation, and progression, quality and transparency across education, training, development and workplace learning (Global Inventory, 2017). The objectives of the NQF are to:

- Create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- Enhance the quality of education and training; and
- Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

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

- Developing, fostering and maintaining an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements;
- Ensuring that SA qualifications meet appropriate criteria, determined by the Minister as contemplated in section 8 of the NQF Act, and are internationally comparable; and
- Ensuring that SA qualifications are of an acceptable quality.

The NQF Act in 2008 strengthened and introduced changes to the NQF, by replacing the 33 Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies with three Quality Councils (QCs), allocating the development of qualifications, standard-setting, quality assurance functions and management of the Sub-Frameworks to the QCs, and changing from an eight-level to a ten-level NQF. As the custodian of the NQF, SAQA has legal responsibility to advance its objectives, as well as to oversee its implementation and further development, and coordinate its sub-frameworks (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008). The structure of the NQF as shown in the table below consists of three NQF sub-frameworks, the general and further education and training qualifications sub-framework (GFETQSF), the higher education qualifications sub-framework (HEQSF), and the occupational qualifications sub-framework (OQSF). Each sub-framework is administered by a quality assurance council (QC), hence the General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (Umalusi) the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). As further shown below, each sub-framework comprises various levels of qualifications.

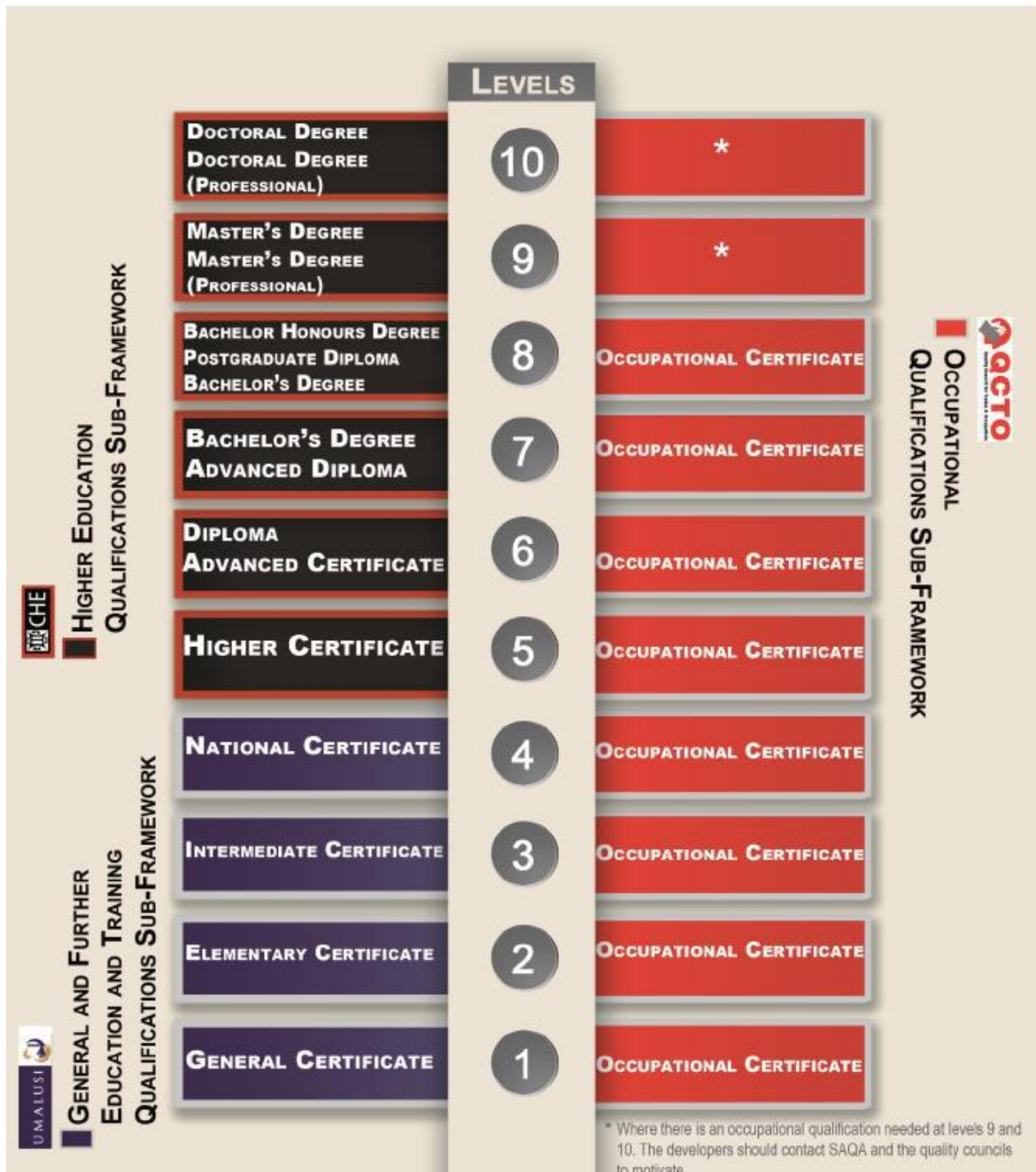


Figure 2: NQF Structure with sub-frameworks
Source: South African Qualifications Authority (2020)

4.2 NQF levels

The SANQF consists of ten levels, for each of which there is an NQF Level Descriptor. Each NQF Sub-Framework comprises a specific range of particular types of qualifications. Each qualification document - such as those for general, intermediate and national certificates; bachelors, honours masters and doctoral degrees; and national occupational certificates – must, in order to be registered on the NQF, state the level at which a learner/s will exit on completion of the qualification, as well as

the knowledge, skills, competences and exit-level outcomes associated with it; access and alternative access criteria; articulation opportunities into and from the qualification; and international comparability, as well as other aspects. e.

The figure below indicates the different qualifications achieved at each NQF level, under each Quality Council.

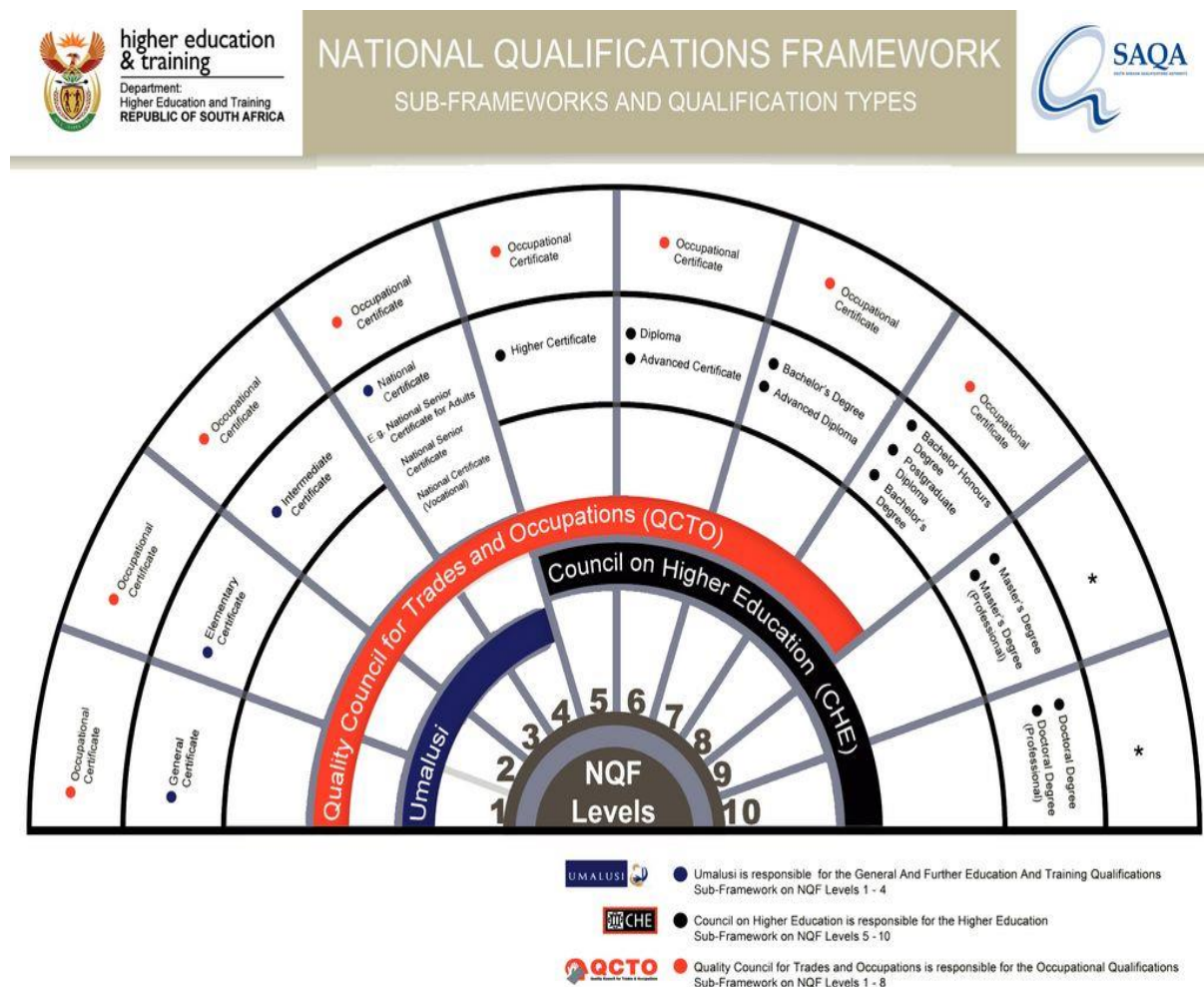


Figure 3: South African National Qualifications Framework levels
Source: South African Qualifications Authority (2020)

4.3 Level descriptors

Levels of learning achievement are described through level descriptors that provide a broad indication of learning achievements or outcomes appropriate to a qualification at that level. Level descriptors support the design and implementation of qualifications and part qualifications, and enable consistency across learning achievements, laying out evaluation criteria for comparability of qualifications within the NQF, and also for international qualifications. The content of the level descriptors is developed by SAQA together with the three Quality Councils, who recommend qualifications for registration on the NQF (SAQA, 2012).

The basis of the NQF and the level descriptors is *applied competence*, which is informed by an outcomes-based theoretical framework used for the South African context (SAQA, 2012, p12). Applied

competence is defined as ‘the ability to put into practice in the relevant context, the learning outcomes acquired in the process of obtaining a qualification or part qualification.’

The NQF includes South African qualifications at all levels. One set of level descriptors applies to all three Sub-Frameworks. The level descriptors give an indication of general cognitive competencies that should be developed by all qualifications at all levels and therefore give broad guidance for the development of exit level outcomes (ELOs), associated assessment criteria (AACs), curriculum content, learning outcomes (LOs) and assessment for qualifications at each level. The positioning of two or more qualifications on the same NQF level indicates that the qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of the complexity of the ELOs of the qualification and the level of generic cognitive competencies developed. The qualification descriptors provide more detailed information on the purpose and nature of the qualification.

The following applied competencies are used across the ten levels of the NQF:

- Scope of knowledge;
- Knowledge literacy;
- Method and procedure;
- Problem solving;
- Ethics and professional practice;
- Accessing, processing and managing information;
- Producing and communicating information;
- Context and systems;
- Management of learning; and
- Accountability.

These competencies are applicable to basic, academic, applied and occupational qualifications and can thus be used across the different educational contexts. Additionally, the critical-cross field outcomes embedded in the level descriptors are broad, overarching outcomes expected to be achieved within all qualifications, regardless of the specific learning area (SAQA, 2012, 2000). These critical-cross field outcomes are thought to be of importance for enabling lifelong learning.

Level descriptors are cumulative (SAQA, 2012). This means that the NQF levels increase, there are corresponding increases in the cognitive levels and complexity of knowledge, skills and competences expected. The higher the NQF level of the qualification held, the higher the levels of knowledge, skills and competence expected of learners. Foundational competence combines the academic skills of knowledge with analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Practical competence introduces the idea of operational context and reflexive competence comprises learner autonomy.

4.4 Use of learning outcomes

Both specific outcomes and critical cross-field outcomes are widely used in the South African NQF. The NQF describes qualifications in terms of the learning outcomes that a qualified learner is expected to display (SAQA, 2000). SAQA (2019b) defines learning outcomes as “contextually demonstrated end-products of specific learning processes, or the recognition of learning, which includes knowledge, skills and values” (p. 5). Each registered qualification states specific outcomes to be achieved by a learner. A specific outcome can be defined as ‘the demonstrated competencies a learner would acquire during the education, training and development process’. These competencies are particular to a specific context and learning programme and are thus distinct from critical outcomes that underpin learning processes across all contexts (Smith, 2006). Qualifications must stipulate the expected critical-cross field outcomes, and opportunities must be made available to develop and assess these critical-cross

field outcomes within learning programmes. Any qualification that is recommended to SAQA for registration must have exit level outcomes stipulated.

A nested learning outcomes approach is used within the SANQF to design qualifications and develop standards. The diagram below shows the four layers of this nested approach:

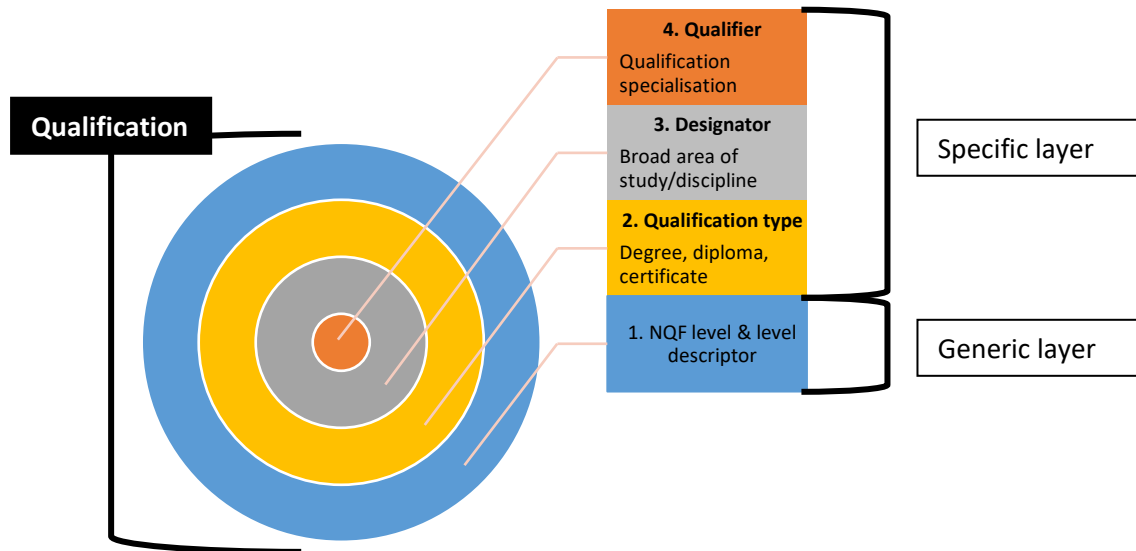


Figure 4: Nested learning outcomes methodology (adapted from SAQA, 2019)

The first layer (blue) contains the most generic standards in the form of level descriptors. The next three layers encompass the more specific standards and learning outcomes in the form of qualification types, broad areas of study, and qualification specialisations.

4.5 Definition of “qualifications”

SAQA (2019a) defines a qualification as:

...a registered national qualification consisting of a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning and which has been assessed in terms of exit level outcomes, registered on the NQF and certified and awarded by a recognised body.

4.6 Development of qualifications

As indicated by the NQF Act and the respective Sub-Framework policies, the quality councils are entrusted to oversee the development and accreditation of part-qualifications and qualifications that fall under their sub-framework before they are registered on the NQF by SAQA. QCs are to ensure that qualifications and part-qualifications meet the criteria specified in the respective Sub-Framework policies (SAQA, 2020c). They are also tasked with providing guidance to qualification developers so that there is a common understanding of the differences between qualifications and part-qualifications, as well as learning programmes and qualification specialisations (SAQA, 2020c). The Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the NQF provide the

format for the development and submission of qualifications and part-qualifications. An example of a format¹ is listed below.

Name of provider/originator:

1. Title of the qualification
2. Field and Sub-field
3. Level
4. Credits
5. Rationale for the qualification
6. Purpose of the qualification
7. Rules of Combination
 - Fundamental² Modules at Level 5
 - Core Modules at Level 5
 - Modules at Level 6
 - Elective Modules at Level 6
 - Modules at Level 7
 - Elective Modules at Level 7
8. Exit-level Outcomes
9. Associated Assessment Criteria
10. International Comparability
11. Integrated Assessment
12. Recognition of prior learning (RPL)
13. Articulation

4.7 Access to qualifications, progression, credits

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (DHET, 2013) addresses the strengthening and support of the articulated PSET system in the country. Despite these developments, the Human Resource Development Council for South Africa (HRDCSA, 2014:4) noted the following challenges faced by TVET Colleges:

- a lack of clarity regarding the existing pathways, in respect of:
 - entry routes (into a College); and
 - exit routes (out of a College), whether it be to higher learning, employment or self-employment.
- inadequate articulation between qualifications as well as programmes, which span more than one NQF Sub-Framework, which leads to dead ends for learners.
- The programmes and qualifications in the Colleges are currently considered to be too complex to administer, difficult to understand and often poorly quality-assured. It is believed that a review of all programmes is required.

The Articulation Policy for the PSET system of South Africa was gazetted in January 2017 (DHET, 2017) as part of the initiatives to address these and other challenges. This policy is an overarching framework that frames SAQA's development of the NQF policy suite and the policies of the three Quality Councils. According to the policy, in a well-articulated system there are clear linkages between different components, with no barriers obstructing progress along any individual learning or work pathways. This implies that a learner is allowed entry into the desired learning programme in any institution,

¹ There is a specific format that is followed for occupational qualifications.

² This is not applicable to all qualifications. It depends on the qualification and the NQF Level.

once this institution recognises the prerequisite skills and knowledge gained from another institution (DHET, 2017).

SAQA (2020) has elaborated the concept of articulation as the process of forming systemic, specific and individual possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for the vertical, horizontal/ lateral and diagonal movement of learners through the formal education and training system and its linkages with the world of work, as follows:

- i. Horizontal articulation is articulation within and between NQF Sub-Frameworks, on the same NQF level.
- ii. Vertical articulation is articulation across NQF levels within an NQF Sub-Framework.
- iii. Diagonal articulation is articulation across NQF levels and across NQF Sub-Frameworks.
- iv. Systemic articulation is a 'joined up' system including qualifications, professional designations, policies and various other official elements that support learning and work pathways.
- v. Specific articulation means aligning qualifications through inter- or intra-institutional agreements such as memoranda of understanding, credit accumulation and transfer and other mechanisms.
- vi. Individual articulation refers to learners being supported in their learning and work pathways through flexible admission, curriculum, learning and teaching, and learner support systems such as the quality of qualifications and learning, career development services, and other mechanisms.

The NQF Act of 2008 requires SAQA, amongst others, to develop policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) after consultation with the three Quality Councils. These policies, published in 2014 and revised in 2016 and 2019 in the case of RPL, and in 2020 in the case of CAT, create additional opportunities for lifelong learners to progress along learning-and-work pathways. Articulation is required within and between the NQF Sub-Frameworks (DHET, 2017; SAQA, 2020)

In addition, currently there are a number of articulation initiatives in the country. SAQA is overseeing an initiative to strengthen learning pathways in the Community Development, Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Engineering sectors – this is a multi-year project involving all the stakeholders needed to ensure articulation. Once the work is completed in these sectors, other SAQA will continue the initiative with other sectors. Since 2019, the implementation of RPL, CAT and articulation by NQF stakeholders across the board, are being tracked. South Africa is one of eight countries involved in UNESCO's Flexible Learning Pathways project – the South African Case Study Report, showcasing good practice and data in this regard, is due for circulation in 2021. There is an overall focus in the country, on RPL, CAT and articulation – and there are as a result, many related initiatives in NQF implementing entities.

5. Legislation

5.1 Legal acts directly applying to the NQF and its implementation

As indicated above, the NQF is governed by a legislative act passed by parliament and signed off by the president of the republic. The NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008 replaced the SAQA Act, Act 58 of 1995. Amendments to the NQF Act of 2008 were signed into law in August 2019 but the National Qualifications Framework Amendment Act has not been proclaimed yet).

5.2 Relation with other related legal acts / regulations

The following legislative acts support implementation of the NQF Act of 2008:

- General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Amendment Act 50 of 2008
- Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016
- Skills Development Act 97 of 1998
- Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999
- Adult Education and Training Act 52 of 2000
- South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 as amended in 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2011
- National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996 as amended in 1997, 1999, 2007, and 2011
- Articulation Policy for the PSET system in South Africa (2017)
- Continuing Education and Training Act 16 of 2006

Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Act 26 of 2010

- Higher Education Act, Act 101 of 1997
- Skills Development Act, Act 97 of 1998
- Skills Development Levies Act, Act 9 of 1999
- Adult Education and Training Act, Act 52 of 2000
- Further Education and Training Colleges Act, Act 16 of 2006
- Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Act, Act 26 of 2010

A number of policies have been developed by SAQA together with the three Quality Councils including:

- National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (as amended in 2019)
- Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF (as amended 2017)
- Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Appeal Policy (2018)
- Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Revocation Policy (2018)
- Addendum on Recognition of Qualifications of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2019)
- Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designations (2020)
- Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-Qualifications (2020)
- Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework (2014)

- Level Descriptors for the South African National Qualifications Framework (2012)
- National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations in South Africa (2017)
- Revised Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) Policy (2020)
- Policy for the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (2014)
- Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (As revised in 2013)

6. Organising systems: governance, institutions, stakeholders

This section addresses the governance, roles, coordination, functions, implementation and monitoring of the NQF. The section also briefly describes the relevant authorities responsible for NQF implementation in South Africa.

Under the NQF Act, quality assurance of qualifications is the executive responsibility of the QCs. SAQA, as custodian of the NQF, oversees its further development and implementation and coordinates the three sub-frameworks. The NQF is a comprehensive system for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications. The NQF Act applies to education and training programmes leading to qualifications and part-qualifications offered by education institutions and skills development providers within the country. Qualifications and part-qualifications must be registered on the NQF in accordance with the NQF Act. The Act also applies to the recognition of professional bodies and the registration of their professional designations, thus bringing professional bodies into the NQF landscape.

The SAQA Act and the implementation of the NQF under the SAQA Act was reviewed in 2002, ultimately leading to further integration in the education and training system via the promulgation of the NQF Act No 67 of 2008. The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the DHET conducted an NQF Act Implementation Evaluation in 2017 and 2018 – leading to an NQF Improvement Plan to be implemented by the DHET, DBE, SAQA and the Quality Councils. It also led to strengthening the NQF partner roles through the development of the NQF Amendment Act No. 12 of 2019. It is expected that this Amendment Act will be enacted in 2021, once the contested parts of it have been addressed.

SAQA has conducted four NQF Impact Studies since the promulgation of the NQF Act in 2009. For the first in 2010, SAQA commissioned a researcher; the study focused on the emerging impact of the then-recently promulgated NQF Act, on the work of SAQA and the Quality Councils. The second NQF Impact Study for which data were gathered in 2014, focused on the impact on the system, of the NQF objectives; SAQA conceptualised and conducted the research, and the Quality Councils contributed to it. It was published in 2017 (SAQA, 2017). The third study in 2017, conducted jointly by SAQA and the Quality Councils (SAQA, 2019a), focused on the impact of:

- (1-2) SAQA's policies for the Recognition of Prior learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and assessment, on the work of the Quality Councils and selected providers;
- (3) the NQF Level Descriptors;
- (4) selected National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) transparency tools;
- (5) Council on Higher Education (CHE) efforts to integrate public and private Higher Education;
- and
- (6) the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) model for qualifications.

The fourth NQF Impact Study, currently underway and being overseen by SAQA, focuses on the implementation and reported impact of national policies for RPL, CAT and articulation, and flexible learning pathways and/or learning-and-work pathways, as applicable. This study includes all categories of NQF implementers.

6.1 Policy and related bodies

The SANQF is the responsibility of the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology (HEST). The NQF Sub-Frameworks mentioned above were determined by the Minister of HEST and are each managed by a QC.

- The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) covering NQF levels 5 to 10: QA oversight provided by the Council on Higher Education (CHE);
- The Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) covering NQF levels 1 to 8: QA oversight provided by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO); and
- The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) covering NQF levels 1 to 4 (NQF Level 1 is open-ended to include schooling qualifications). QA oversight is provided by the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi).

7. Quality assurance of qualifications

7.1 Legal base of the QA framework

The functions of SAQA and the ambit of its authority are stipulated in Section 13 of the NQF Act 67 of 2008. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology has overall responsibility for the NQF. SAQA, Quality Councils and the DHET are responsible for executing the resolutions of the Minister. The quality assurance councils are guided by the NQF amendment Act of 2019, and have continued with quality compliance work and enhanced development standards despite changes and developments in the NQF.

7.2 Scope of the QA framework

Quality assurance is defined as “the processes of ensuring that specified standards or requirements for teaching, learning, education administration, assessment and the recording of achievements have been met” (SAQA, 2017b: p48).

According to Section 27 of the NQF Act 2008, the functions of Quality Councils are as follows:

QC must, in order to achieve the objectives of the NQF—

- (a) perform its functions subject to this Act and the law by which the QC is established;
- (b) comply with any policy determined by the Minister in terms of section 8(2)(b);
- (c) consider the Minister’s guidelines contemplated in section 8(2)(c);
- (d) collaborate with the SAQA and other QCs in terms of the system contemplated in section 13(1)(f)(i);

- (e) develop and manage its sub-framework, and make recommendations thereon to the relevant Minister;
- (f) advise the relevant Minister on matters relating to its sub-framework;
- (g) with regard to level descriptors—
 - (i) consider and agree to level descriptors contemplated in section 13(1)(g)(i); and
 - (ii) ensure that they remain current and appropriate;
- (h) with regard to qualifications for its sub-framework—
 - (i) develop and implement policy and criteria, taking into account the policy and criteria contemplated in section 13(1)(h)(i), for the development, registration and publication of qualifications;
 - (ii) develop and implement policy and criteria, taking into account the policy and criteria contemplated in section 13(1)(h)(iii), for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer;
 - (iii) ensure the development of such qualifications or part qualifications as are necessary for the sector, which may include appropriate measures for the assessment of learning achievement; and
 - (iv) recommend qualifications or part qualifications to the SAQA for registration;
- (i) with regard to quality assurance within its sub-framework—
 - (i) develop and implement policy for quality assurance;
 - (ii) ensure the integrity and credibility of quality assurance;
 - (iii) ensure that such quality assurance as is necessary for the sub-framework is undertaken;
- (j) with regard to information matters—
 - (i) maintain a database of learner achievements and related matters for the purposes of this Act; and
 - (ii) submit such data in a format determined in consultation with the SAQA for recording on the national learners' records database contemplated in section 13(1)(l);
- (k) with regard to other matters—
 - (i) conduct or commission and publish research on issues of importance to the development and implementation of the sub-framework;
 - (ii) inform the public about the sub-framework;
 - (iii) perform any other function required by this Act; and
 - (iv) perform any function consistent with this Act that the relevant Minister may determine.

7.3 QA bodies and regulators in NQF implementation

7.3.1 Umalusi

Umalusi Council sets and monitors standards for general and further education and training in South Africa in accordance with the NQF Act No 67 of 2008 [as amended] and the GENFETQA Act No 58 of 2001 [as amended]. The Council is tasked with the development and management of a sub-framework of qualifications for general and further education and training and for the attendant quality assurance (Umalusi, 2020).

Umalusi is currently responsible for quality assurance and certification of the following qualifications:

- Schools:
 - Senior³ Certificate amended (SCa) – continues as a revised qualification for adults
 - National Senior Certificate (NSC)
- TVET Colleges:
 - National Technical Certificate (N1 - 3)
 - National Certificate (Vocational) (NCV)

³ This is for Community Education and Training Centres.

- Community Education and Training Centres:
 - General Education and Training Certificate: Adults (GETC)
 - Senior Certificate amended (SCa) – continues as a revised qualification for adults

7.3.2 Council on Higher Education (CHE)

The CHE is a statutory entity that monitors and tracks trends in the post-schooling and higher education sector, advises the Minister, and further ensures and promotes quality in the higher education system. Additionally, the CHE is mandated to audit higher education institutions, evaluate and accredit programmes offered, develop the HEQSF and set standards.

7.3.3 Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

The QCTO was established in 2010 in terms of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998. Its role is to oversee the design, implementation, assessment and certification of occupational qualifications, including trades, on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF). The QCTO also offers guidance to skills development providers who must be accredited by the QCTO to offer occupational qualifications (QCTO, 2020). The QCTO is responsible for:

- Establishment and management of the Occupational Qualification Sub-framework (OQSF);
- Occupational standards and qualifications development and maintenance;
- Accreditation of Skills Development Providers;
- Accreditation of Assessment Centres;
- Assessment;
- Certification;
- Research and Knowledge Development; and
- Stakeholder Management and Advocacy.

7.4 Participation in international bodies

Since its development, global partnerships and collaboration have always been a critical component to strengthen the proper development and execution trajectory of the NQF under the stewardship of SAQA. International best practice has provided substantial contribution to its evolution, presenting opportunities to add value and provide benefit. SAQA works with global counterparts on various issues of mutual interest regarding qualifications frameworks, reporting developments and approaches to the respective QCs and relevant stakeholders.

SAQA was instrumental in the establishment of the African Qualifications Verification Network (AQVN) and to date is a member of its council. In 2019, SAQA, attended the AQVN conference and AGM with representatives from numerous other African countries, discussing issues related to the conference theme of ‘Qualifications recognition beyond borders - collaborations to ease the verification of qualifications in Africa’ (SAQA, 2019a).

The CHE is a member of the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN), a voluntary organisation that brings together quality assurance bodies and higher education institutions from Southern Africa with a view to promoting quality in higher education, fostering harmonisation of quality assurance systems in the region and beyond; and facilitating international recognition of higher education qualifications from Southern Africa to enhance mobility of staff and students (SAQAN, 2020:1).

Umalusi is a member of international organisations involved in educational assessment techniques such as the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA), the African Association of

Educational Assessment (AAEA), and the Southern Africa Association for Educational Assessment (SAAEA), amongst others.

8. NQF implementation

8.1 Registration of qualifications on the NQF

SAQA is responsible for the management information system of the NQF, which facilitates management and reporting on the national education and training system of the country (SAQA, 2020:1). The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) is the central and national database for all SAQA education and training data. The NLRD includes the following records of education and training:

- Qualifications and part qualifications registered on the NQF, their purpose statements, exit level outcomes and assessment criteria, and the NQF sub-framework allocated to each qualification and part qualification;
- The twelve organising fields and the subfields of the NQF;
- Quality Assurance Functionaries;
- Accredited providers;
- Other qualification-related information per qualification and part-qualification;
- Records of learning achievements; and
- Recognised professional bodies and their Professional Designations that meet the required criteria Misrepresented and fraudulent qualifications.

The NLRD provides decision-makers with comprehensive information about trends in education and training, and the labour market.

8.2 Funding

In terms of the Act, SAQA may be funded by the state, donations, user charges, investments, and other available sources. The DHET provides an annual grant from the fiscus to SAQA for streamlined responsibilities, and the major portions of its revenue comes from fees for verification of national qualifications, evaluation of foreign qualifications, recognition of professional bodies and registration of professional designations and other supplementary income. Funding for the setting of standards and quality assurance within the Quality Councils comes similarly from the fiscus and from fees charged by the Quality Councils.

8.3 Monitoring, evaluation, and development

The SAQA Act and the implementation of the NQF under the SAQA Act was reviewed in 2002, ultimately leading to further integration in the education and training system via the promulgation of the NQF Act No 67 of 2008. The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the DHET conducted an NQF Act Implementation Evaluation in 2017 and 2018 – leading to an NQF Improvement Plan to be implemented by the DHET, DBE, SAQA and the Quality Councils. It also led to strengthening the NQF partner roles through the development of the NQF Amendment Act No. 12 of 2019. It is expected that this Amendment Act will be enacted in 2021, once the contested parts of it have been addressed.

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objectives; SAQA conceptualised and conducted the research, and the Quality Councils contributed to it. It was published in 2017 (SAQA, 2017). The fourth NQF Impact Study, currently underway and being overseen by SAQA, focuses on the implementation and reported impact of national policies for RPL, CAT and articulation, and flexible learning pathways and/or learning-and-work pathways, as applicable. This study includes all categories of NQF implementers.

9. Validation of prior learning, non-formal and informal learning

9.1 Relation of RPL and NQF

The SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 and later the NQF Act of 2008, have required SAQA to ‘develop policy and criteria, after consultation with the QCs, for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer’ (NQF Act 2008). SAQA’s (2013; 2016; 2016) RPL policy documents elaborate the purpose of RPL and processes for its implementation (SAQA, 2017). Two main forms of RPL are distinguished, one to provide alternative access routes into learning programmes professional designations, employment and career progression; the other, and the other to provide for the awarding of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF.

The purpose of SAQA’s (2019) RPL policy is to provide for the implementation of RPL in the context of the NQF Act – it positions RPL in relation to the overarching principles and priorities of the NQF in South Africa. The Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy (DHET, 2016) provides for the coordination and funding of RPL and elaborates and holds SAQA and the Quality Councils (QCs) accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act.

RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic way, where a holistic approach includes the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, and requires the involvement of the full range of NQF stakeholders.

The *Ministerial RPL Policy* is a strategic national policy that is designed to:

- a. Provide for the co-ordination and funding of RPL;
- b. Strengthen enabling policy environment for the implementation of RPL across the entire system for education, training, development and work;
- c. Clarify roles of key stakeholders; and
- d. Provide a high-level framework for RPL implementation.

The objectives of this *2019 Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* are to:

- a. Ensure that the objectives of the NQF Act are met, especially to:
 - i. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education and training and career paths, (section 5 (1) (b) of the NQF Act); and
 - ii. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities (section 5 (1) (d) of the NQF Act);
- b. Ensure that the Sub-Frameworks and policies of the Quality Councils (QCs) comply with this *2019 Amended RPL Policy and Criteria*;

- c. Enable SAQA to:
 - i. support the MHET and the DHET to provide firm policy principles for the further development and implementation of RPL;
 - ii. advise, guide, and support the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL;
 - iii. conduct research into a sustainable model for the quality assurance of RPL;
 - iv. receive RPL-related data uploads for the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD); and

- d. Ensure that achievements via RPL are certificated, and that there is no distinction, other than for data analysis, between qualifications/ part-qualifications/ professional designations awarded via conventional and RPL routes respectively.

The *Amended RPL Policy and Criteria* applies to the DHET and other Government Departments, SAQA, the QCs, all registered and accredited education and training providers (public and private), SAQA-recognised professional bodies, RPL practitioners and all other entities that implement the NQF and RPL in the country; RPL candidates; and all qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered by SAQA.

SAQA's (2019) aligned RPL policy and criteria outline the principles and criteria for implementing RPL across NQF contexts, and provide details on the responsibilities regarding implementing RPL, of the various categories of NQF partners and stakeholders.

9.2 Stage of development of RPL

Considering RPL between 1995 and 2008 in South Africa – an Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) study of RPL involving over 20 countries positioned South Africa in a cluster of five countries at 'Stage 5 of 7' that comprised a country with 'islands of good RPL practices'.

In 2010-11, SAQA hosted national workshops to identify and address blockages towards establishing a fully-fledged national RPL system. These events were followed by the work of a Ministerial RPL Task Team to address legislative and other barriers to the expansion of RPL, and the revision of national RPL policy that provided pointers for (1) effective delivery models for RPL; (2) enhancing the quality of RPL; and (3) workable funding models for RPL.

For five years between these events and the end of 2015, SAQA supported over 20 organisational RPL initiatives and around 100 individuals a year – assisting entities that approached it. This type of assistance is currently provided by the NQF Directorate in the DHET.

Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL and while the three Quality Councils must oversee the submission of RPL data for uploading in the NLRD, there are few sanctions for non-submission and only some entities submit these data. Since 2014 when the submission of the data became mandatory, SAQA has made systematic efforts to conscientise NQF stakeholders in this respect and to enable the RPL data loads into the NLRD. While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, the amount of RPL being submitted is increasing over time. At the time of writing, the number of learners who had achieved one or more part-qualifications via RPL was 87 915, with the records of achievements of part-qualifications via RPL numbering 1 610 956.

10. Recognition of foreign qualifications

SAQA is mandated to evaluate foreign to provide a foreign qualifications evaluation and advisory service consistent with the Act. The SAQA Policy and Criteria for Evaluating Foreign Qualifications within the South African NQF (amended in 2017) is the main instrument and contains the criteria for evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications, supported by the SAQA Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Appeal Policy and the SAQA Foreign Qualifications Evaluation Revocation Policy. The appeal policy allows learners the right to appeal the outcome of a recognition decision (SAQA, 2018), while the revocation policy grants SAQA the right to revoke the recognition of a foreign qualification/s when ‘...new information has come to light which contradicts the information on which evaluation outcomes were based’ (SAQA, 2017). An Addendum to the Policy and Criteria provides for the recognition of qualifications of refugees and asylum seekers. In its recognition of foreign qualifications SAQA is also bound by the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (commonly known as the Addis Convention), which South Africa ratified.

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) was established in 2000 and is responsible for the registration as well as management of professional development of teachers. There has been an extension of the council’s registration scope since 2008, allowing registering of foreign qualifications. Registration of foreign teaching qualifications depends on the definition of a teacher. Those who are academically qualified, but professionally unqualified (i.e. having no teaching qualification) are registered on condition that they undertake a teaching qualification within a given time period.

During an interview with the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), it was reported that a number of teachers who are members of the union originate from other African countries. Teacher mobility will be supported for as long as there are open borders and teachers having the scarce skills that are needed in the country. Argument was made for the importance of upholding these teachers’ human rights and maintaining their dignity, as well as supporting vulnerable foreign teachers.

11. Interrelationships with other countries and regions

There is a process to ensure harmonisation (a common understanding) in the development of regional qualification systems in order to facilitate movement of learners within the 16 SADC member states. The idea of a SADC Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) was discussed at a meeting of SADC Education Ministers who, in 1997, agreed on this process to drive easy access, and mobility of learners and employees in the SADC region. The fundamental reason for this process of harmonising education and training systems in the region is to give mutual recognition to qualifications that enjoy the same status and credits across the region; and to encourage and stimulate credit transfer within and amongst state members in the region and beyond (JET Education Services, 2017).

To this end, South Africa is the first SADC country to align its NQF to the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). The process of alignment of the SANQF to the SADCQF concluded that there is a clear and demonstrable link between qualification levels in the SANQF and level descriptors of the SADCQF, shown structurally, conceptually and linguistically (SAQA, 2019a). Through SAQA, the South African NQF is well recognised globally. Most of the countries in the SADC region benchmark their

NQFs against the SANQF, with many obtaining support or assistance from SAQA in the development, and to some extent, implementation of their NQFs.

12. Relevance of the ACQF process

Overall, the majority of interviewees were aware of the development of the ACQF and viewed it in a positive light. All interviewees felt that the ACQF was needed. SACE representatives had the following to say:

There is definitely [a need], especially for education. We would all be responding to a common good, and it would respond to many policies already in existence (CESA, Agenda 2063). If we are to lead as a continent, it would be important to have policies aligned. When the ACQF is in place, it will ensure that foreign nationals mobilise within the country. As a member of the AU, we need to strengthen our processes and ensure that we keep the end goal of quality education (SDG 4) in mind. We would be able to attract professionals with scarce skills to South Africa, and also produce professionals in the country who can be mobilised out of the country.

The representative from NAPTOSA endorsed the need for the ACQF as he felt that some African countries are more efficient than others and can thus produce a lot of learnings across the continent. He went on to say that the idea of a shared African identity is important and the ACQF can help foster this. Professional recognition could have beneficial implications for other levels of community. Establishment of an ACQF will streamline equivalency and comparability of qualifications, reducing the red tape involved in verifying qualifications.

The representative from CHE stated that the SANQF system is more mature and well developed. He suggested that the ACQF might learn some useful lessons from the SANQF.

The SACE representative suggested that children and families will benefit from a greater workforce and will see Africa as a continent of opportunity and promote Africanism, once the ACQF is implemented. Similarly, the DBE interviewee reported that the ACQF process is important and necessary as it will enable articulation across the continent, as well as provide important learnings for South Africa. She argued:

We have many qualifications that we are not sure will be recognised across Africa and globally. It will also assist in decolonisation as learnings are gained from different countries, especially in subject areas where we as a country perform poorly. Trust, transparency and trade will be enhanced through the process.

For the DBE, the greatest benefit will be learnings from other countries, especially around Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and indigenous knowledge systems and how to better formulate curricula. The interviewee felt that well-formulated curricula will ensure the development of learners who are active and responsible citizens who can enter the world of work and also be lifelong learners.

The following advice was given by various stakeholders to the ACQF developers:

'During the development of the ACQF, we should not lose sight of the bigger picture. We remain global citizens and we instil this in our learners. When we do benchmarking, we should not lose sight of what is happening globally. The development of the ACQF and whatever resulting

instruments that are put in place must be based on rigorous research so that results are credible and reflect the actual situation on the ground in each country.'

'The developers must take into consideration regional processes that are in place (such as the SADC Mobility Protocol) and understand how these respond to the needs on the ground. The developers should learn from quality assurance processes that are in place at a country level. Induction would be an important process to consider once the ACQF framework is implemented, and within this induction, curriculum would have to be included for educators.'

'Ensure wide engagement with all stakeholders, especially unions in South Africa as they have regular interaction with members.'

There is a general consensus from all interviewees regarding the importance and relevance of developing the African Continental Qualifications Framework. This has been seen as an effort to facilitate mobility and harmonisation of qualifications systems across the continent. For the continent to be a key role player in the globalised world, the development of a continental qualifications framework is key.

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