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NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Established in terms of Act 58 of 1995

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF QUALIFICATIONS

Abstract

Making sense of, and implementing a new education and training system often results in a cutting-up of the system into more manageable pieces. While it is therefore quite understandable that the Sector Education and Training Authorities' Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (SETA ETQAs) have focused their initial energies on the core components of qualifications, namely those parts that have a direct influence and also that emanate from practices in their respective sectors, it has resulted in fragmentation of qualifications, and in particular, in fragmentation of the delivery, assessment and quality assurance of the fundamental components of qualifications for which the SETA ETQAs are accredited. This paper proposes a pragmatic model to address the issue of decontextualised fundamental components of qualifications, the lack of capacity to deliver and quality assure such components and a clarification of evolving partnerships in the education and training arena. However, the model does not claim to be the final answer to these particular issues, but hopes to create a space where closer collaboration, agreement and a common philosophy amongst the partners in education and training, is fostered.

SAQA'S MISSION
"To ensure the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework which contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large."

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

A qualification is defined as:

> *…a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose or purposes, intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning*

Two types of qualification are provided for in the National Standards Bodies (NSB) regulations (Act 58 of 1995):

- *Unit standard based qualifications*
- *Exit level outcome and associated assessment criteria (ELOAC) qualifications (non unit standard based qualifications)*

The NSB regulations further require that each qualification should contain three distinct *categories of learning,* namely:

- *Fundamental learning – that learning that forms the grounding or basis needed to undertake the education, training or further learning required in the obtaining of the qualification*
- *Core learning – that compulsory learning required in situations contextually relevant to the particular qualification*
- *Elective learning – a selection of additional credits at the level of the National Qualifications Framework specified, from which a choice may be made to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved*

FET	Further Education and Training
FETI	Further Education and Training Institution (previously known as technical colleges)
MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority
NSB	National Standards Bodies
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education
ETQA:	
Band ETQA	Band Education and Training Quality Assurance body, for example the Higher Education Quality Committee and UMALUSI
SETA ETQA	Sector Education and Training Authority Education and Training Quality Assurance body
SAQA	The South African Qualifications Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) have the statutory responsibility to quality assure the delivery and assessment of qualifications and unit standards that fall within their primary focus. Qualifications that deal with the primary focus of mining, for example, would be quality assured by the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA). Registered national qualifications are developed in accordance with certain rules of combination as captured in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (No. R452 of 28 March 1998) (see Definitions and Acronyms). These rules of combination require that registered qualifications consist of three distinct components: fundamental, core and elective components. ETQAs are therefore responsible for the quality assurance of all the components of the qualification and in fact should do so in a holistic and integrated manner. However, emerging practice seems to suggest that the sector ETQAs in particular, tend to focus their quality assurance activities mainly on the core components of the qualifications. The main reason, according to some of the ETQAs, is that they lack the capacity to quality assure the fundamental components of the qualification as their expertise is situated within the work-related components of the qualification, i.e. the core.

In addition, the sector ETQAs seem to have the perception that UMALUSI, the Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training "owns" all the fundamental unit standards and therefore has the responsibility to quality assure the fundamental components in all qualifications in the general and further education and training band (NQF level 1-4). This suggests that UMALUSI is required to quality assure provisioning at their constituent Further Education and Training Institutions (FETIs); providers focusing on the delivery of Communication, Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy and Language schools; in addition to sector specific providers accredited by Sector Education and Training Authorities Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (SETA ETQAs). Clearly, the scale of this work is enormous, but what is of greater concern is that this approach may lead to the fragmentation of the qualification and is in fact, in direct conflict with a holistic, integrated approach to teaching, learning and assessment. This approach suggests that the fundamentals (i.e. Communication and Mathematical Literacy) are to be delivered outside of the context of the rest of the qualification with the result that these components are not fully integrated in the teaching, learning and assessment. It is therefore doubtful whether the fundamentals, in particular, could be ' that learning that forms the grounding or basis needed to undertake the education, training or further learning' (NSB Regulations), especially if it is taught, learnt and assessed in isolation.

In an attempt to address the problems experienced by the Sector Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has developed a model that has been agreed to in principle by the SETA ETQAs and UMALUSI. These proposals will be discussed as follows:
- Scope
- Current situation
- A model for the quality assurance of fundamental components of qualifications
- Systemic quality assurance
- Funding

3. SCOPE

This proposal covers the quality assurance of all fundamentals in the Further Education and Training band, from NQF Level 1 – 4, offered by all accredited providers, including providers accredited through the SETA ETQAs, across all 12 fields of learning[1]. It also covers the transfer of credits between equivalent levels of learning attained in the different parts of the system, i.e. schooling, further education and training (technical colleges) and sector education and training.

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[1] Agriculture and Nature Conservation; Culture and Arts; Business, Commerce & Management Studies; Commercial Studies and Languages; Education and Training and Development; Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology; Human and Social Studies; Law, Military Science and Security; Health Science and Social Services; Physical, Maths, Computer and Life Sciences; Services; Physical Planning and Construction.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

4.1   Teaching, assessment and quality assurance of the fundamental components of a qualification

A "snap shot survey" conducted at the end of 2004, indicated that the majority of SETA ETQAs claim to not have the capacity to quality assure the fundamental components of the qualifications they are responsible for. Their focus is on the industry specific core and elective unit standards of the qualifications.

When accredited providers of the SETA ETQAs deliver full qualifications, i.e. encompassing all the components of the qualification, they tend to not offer the fundamental components. Lack of expertise is noted as one of the reasons, and financial viability is another. Learners are therefore issued with credits towards the full qualification, but the provider cannot certificate, as learners have not met the requirements for the fundamental components of the qualification.

In some cases the ETQAs have appointed providers specialising in the fundamental components to deliver, assess and quality assure the fundamentals on the ETQAs' behalf, after which certification can take place.

As noted above, some ETQAs are of the opinion that it is the responsibility of UMALUSI to quality assure the fundamental components. UMALUSI on the other hand is of the opinion that they neither have the capacity to quality assure all the fundamental components, nor are they prepared to quality assure the fundamental components in isolation from the rest of the qualification. UMALUSI is also of the opinion that the teaching, learning and assessment of the fundamental components should take place in an integrated manner.

4.2   Transfer and recognition of credits attained through a prior qualification

An additional complication is the transfer of credits between learning attained outside of the sector as being equivalent to the fundamental requirements of the sector qualifications. Theoretically, the languages/communication and mathematics attained as part of a schooling certificate, could be recognised as being equivalent to the fundamental requirements of the sector qualification, i.e. if a learner has successfully completed the languages and mathematics in grade 12, then those credits can be carried to an equivalent level qualification without the need to redo these parts of the qualification. However, there are currently different models utilised by SETA ETQAs. Some of these include:

- No recognition of any qualifications obtained in a school environment is accepted by the ETQA and the learner has to redo all the fundamental unit standards.

- Some recognition is given of qualifications obtained in a school environment, but the learner must still go through a process of RPL to obtain the fundamental unit standards.

- Full recognition is given to the learner for qualifications obtained in a school environment and the learner need not repeat any fundamental unit standards.

This is a fundamental problem that needs serious attention. Learners who attained credits for languages/communication and mathematics at a schooling level should not be required to redo, or undergo RPL, (except in the sense of access to the qualification), of an equivalent level of learning.

An example may be helpful at this point:

Teachers of grade 8 learners are often heard to complain that learners entering high school are not up to standard, particularly in languages and in mathematics. However, the learner cannot be refused to progress to grade 8 – his/her grade 7 cannot be 'taken away' or be disregarded, the learner cannot

be 'sent back' to primary school. This does not say that the teachers' complaints are not valid, but that it is the responsibility of the receiving institution (the high school), to diagnose the problem and to accommodate the deficiencies in an appropriate learning programme.

The analogy is similar for this particular context: Where a learner has attained credits in relation to a schooling certificate, those credits cannot be ignored or disregarded when he/she seeks to enter a qualification at an equivalent level – it smacks of 'gate-keeping' - where it could rather help to diagnose the problem and create opportunities for schooling (UMALUSI) and sector education and training (SETA ETQAs) to work collaboratively to improve the situation.

However, if the learner, who wishes to enter a sector qualification, and he/she did not offer Mathematics as a school subject, for example, and this is a requirement for the sector qualification, then clearly, such credits do not exist, and the learner will be required to meet the requirements of the fundamental unit standards dealing with mathematical literacy as appropriate. Where a learner feels that they could meet the requirements of such unit standards, without proof of the pre-requisite, RPL can be requested and where the learner is successful in the assessment of prior learning, credits can be awarded.

The following is a model that could be used where credits are transferred between school / FET qualifications and sector qualifications.

NATIONAL QUALIFICATION	LITERACY/ (COMMUNICATIONS)				NUMERACY / (MATHEMATICS)				2ⁿᵈ LANGUAGE
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L1	L2	L3	L4	
Gr 12 with Mathematics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gr 12 without Mathematics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Grade 11 with Mathematics	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes, at the appropriate level
Grade 11 without Mathematics	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes, at the appropriate level
Grade 10 with Mathematics	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes, at the appropriate level
Grade 10 without Mathematics	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes, at the appropriate level
Grade 9	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes, at the appropriate level
FET N1 – N6	Recognition at appropriate level								

Table 1: A model for credit transfer

It is therefore recommended that credits be transferred for equivalent levels of learning, whether they were obtained in a school environment, a further education and training institution environment or a sector qualification environment. Nevertheless, a "base-line assessment tool" could be utilised to diagnose possible deficiencies, and to develop remedial actions plans, but should not be used to determine whether a learner is given access to the qualification or not. Such a tool could also be used for the recognition of prior learning where no proof of previous learning exists. In that case, credits can be awarded and learners are exempted from the part of the learning programme that deals with the unit standards encompassing the appropriate fundamental components (communication and/or mathematical literacy, etc.) of the qualification.

Clearly, the current situation is untenable, both in terms of the quality assurance and of credit transfer. The following models have been agreed and should be seen as a start to address the problems identified above. However, these models are not definitive and implementation should be mindful of other emerging issues.

5. A MODEL FOR THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF QUALIFICATIONS

The following model is the result of various workshops and was considered by the participants to be a pragmatic and evolving model. The model consists of the establishment of agreements and/or memoranda of understanding, proposed curriculum interventions and proposed delivery and quality assurance.

5.1 Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding

The lack of agreement and/or memoranda of understanding that guide and define participation in and responsibilities for quality assurance processes, is seen to be one of the major inhibitors to the improvement of quality in education and training (see NQF Impact Study, Cycle 2 report, SAQA, 2005). It is therefore critical that engagement with partners in education and training should be based on sound principles where responsibilities are shared and informed by each other's requirements. The agreed upon basis of a "generic MoU" would also assist in this quality assurance issue. While it is acknowledged that the model will evolve towards a more holistic and integrated model, it is important to formalise arrangements for quality assurance of the fundamental components of particularly, sector qualifications. The key partners in this model include UMALUSI, the SETA ETQAs and the provincial Departments of Education. Figure 1 explains the relationships.
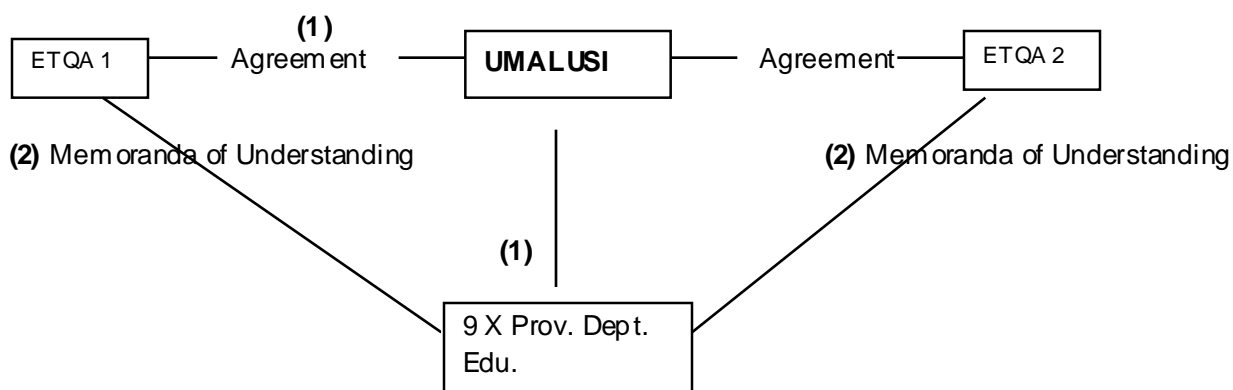

Figure 1: The relationship between partners in education and training

(1) These agreements are reached between UMALUSI and the ETQAs. The Agreement between the ETQA and UMALUSI is signed because in the structure of UMALUSI the Provincial Education Departments are the providers. Most of these are already in place. This signed Agreement allows for the ETQAs to engage with the various Provincial Departments of Education.

(2) The ETQAs will draft and sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with the 9 Provincial Departments of Education. These Memoranda of Understanding will stipulate the working relationship between the ETQAs and the public FET colleges and other accredited bodies to offer the delivery and assessment of the Fundamental unit standards, on behalf of the relevant ETQA. The MoU will enable ETQAs to cluster for the purpose of fundamental delivery, based on their combined fields of expertise. The clustered ETQAs approach those FET colleges and other accredited providers, identified by the Provincial Departments, to jointly develop learning material and assessment tools for the delivery and assessment of Fundamentals for the clustered ETQAs.

5.2   Curriculum Intervention in Clusters

Agreements and rules of engagement however, are not enough. To address the needs of all parties, and develop processes whereby the fundamental components of qualifications are integral to the delivery and assessment of the overall learning programme, it is essential to agree on and jointly develop the approach. Figure 2 represents the underpinning curriculum conceptualisation and planning required:
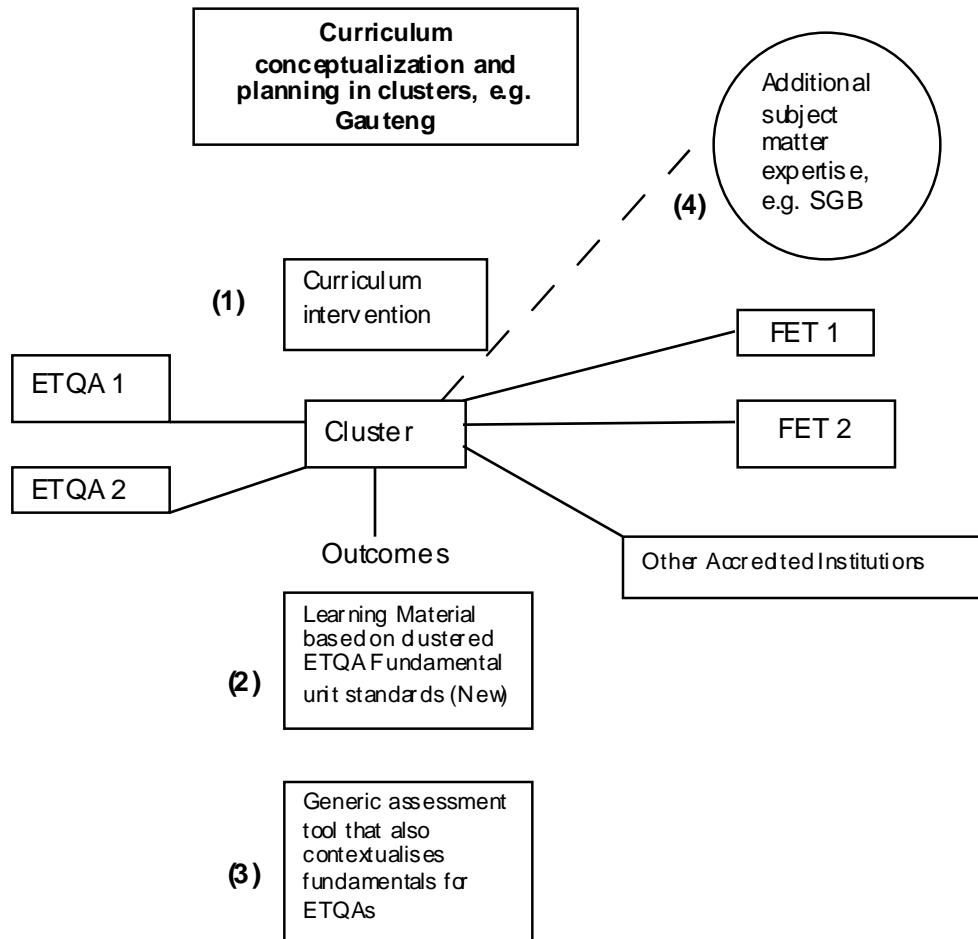

Figure 2: Underpinning curriculum conceptualisation and planning

(1) This curriculum intervention will assist in contextualising the fundamental components of the qualification for their cluster, which furthermore allows for integration of assessment to take place.

(2) Working in clusters will reduce the possibility of every qualification having its own customised fundamentals. The outcome of working in clusters will result in the learning material for the fundamentals that will be generic enough to be delivered across ETQAs, yet at the same time delivery will be contextualised to suit the needs of the industry within which the ETQA operates. A baseline assessment tool will be developed as part of the learning material to diagnose deficiencies to inform possible remedial work required to be accommodated in the learning programme.

(3) The different assessment tools to be used must be generic enough to be used across sectors, yet specific enough to allow for integration and contextualisation.

(4) Where and when the need arises then additional subject matter experts can be consulted and their expertise can be brought in for a short period of time. Using the SGB's might be particularly helpful with regard to the contextualisation.

5.3 Delivery and Quality Assurance

Once the clusters have agreed on the issues mentioned above, the responsibilities for delivery and quality assurance of the learning programmes should be defined. In this model, it is proposed that the fundamental components of qualifications are delivered and assessed by public Further Education and Training Institutions as agreed with their ETQA, UMALUSI.
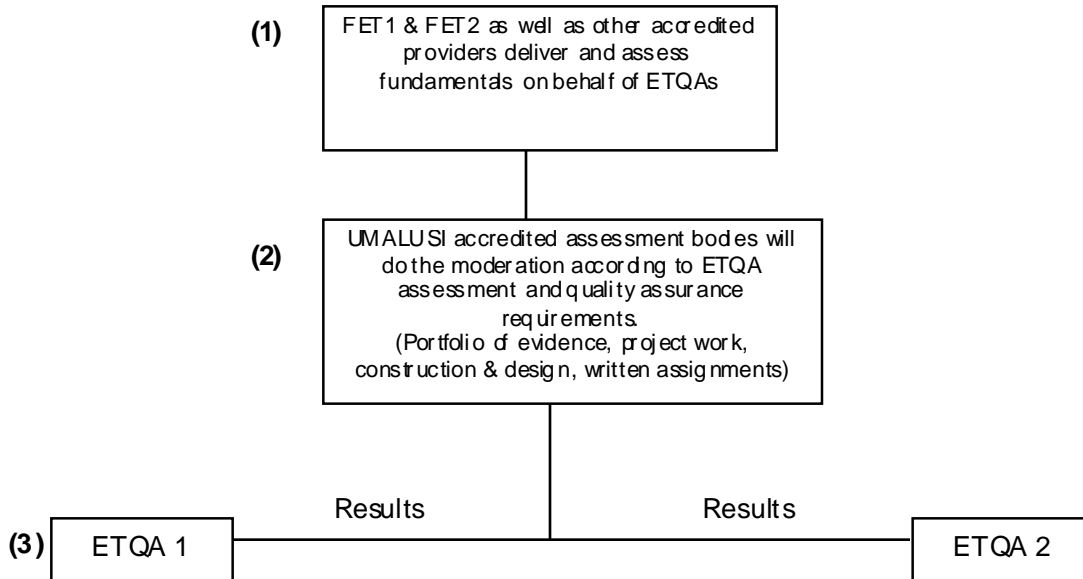

(1) FET1 & FET2 as well as other accredited providers deliver and assess fundamentals on behalf of ETQAs

(2) UMALUSI accredited assessment bodies will do the moderation according to ETQA assessment and quality assurance requirements.
(Portfolio of evidence, project work, construction & design, written assignments)

(3) ETQA 1 — Results — Results — ETQA 2

Figure 3: Delivery, assessment and quality assurance of fundamental components

(1) Public Further Education and Training Institutions deliver and assess contextualised fundamental components of qualifications that fall within the cluster
(2) ETQAs sign agreements with accredited assessment bodies to quality assure assessment that took place at FET and other accredited institutions, through delegation of that responsibility. (SAQA's approval must be sought for the delegation of quality assurance)
(3) UMALUSI accredited assessment bodies undertake the moderation as agreed with the partners to the Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding

These agreements are underpinned by the following principles:

- UMALUSI accredited assessment bodies will quality assure the processes and assessment through a system outside that of the traditional examination system utilised for full-time FET learners. The quality assurance should be acceptable to SETA ETQAs and to UMALUSI. It is critical to evolve the model to one where parity of esteem is achieved and the assessment and quality assurance must therefore ensure that the validity of the results are maintained.

- The UMALUSI accredited assessment bodies issue quality assurance reports on the delivery and assessment by FET Institutions directly to the SETA ETQAs and informs UMALUSI of the outcomes.

- ETQAs certify learners for qualifications based on the quality assurance of the accredited assessment bodies, which include credits for the fundamental components of the qualification and takes responsibility for the upload of the information on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

6.   SYSTEMIC QUALITY ASSURANCE

Moderating bodies will be appointed by SAQA to ensure that standards drift does not take place or is kept to a minimum. The composition of these moderating bodies will include ETQAs and UMALUSI

7.   FUNDING

A separate dedicated task team should be constituted to investigate the funding implications of this model. It is suggested that the ETQAs, along with all the other role-players, develop a funding structure that is acceptable to the FET and other institutions for the delivery and assessment, as well as a funding structure for the quality assurance by the assessment bodies.

8.   CONCLUSION

The proposals contained in this paper should by no means be seen as the final say on the matter. However, it attempts to provide a pragmatic approach to a problem that is placing the quality of the system at risk. It should be seen as a first attempt to bring together the different role players in a meaningful way and as such, may provide benefits over and above the logistical, capacity and operational problems emerging from practice. The benefits include the development of communities of trust and of practice, which in turn may facilitate parities of esteem amongst and between the different sectors of the education and training community.