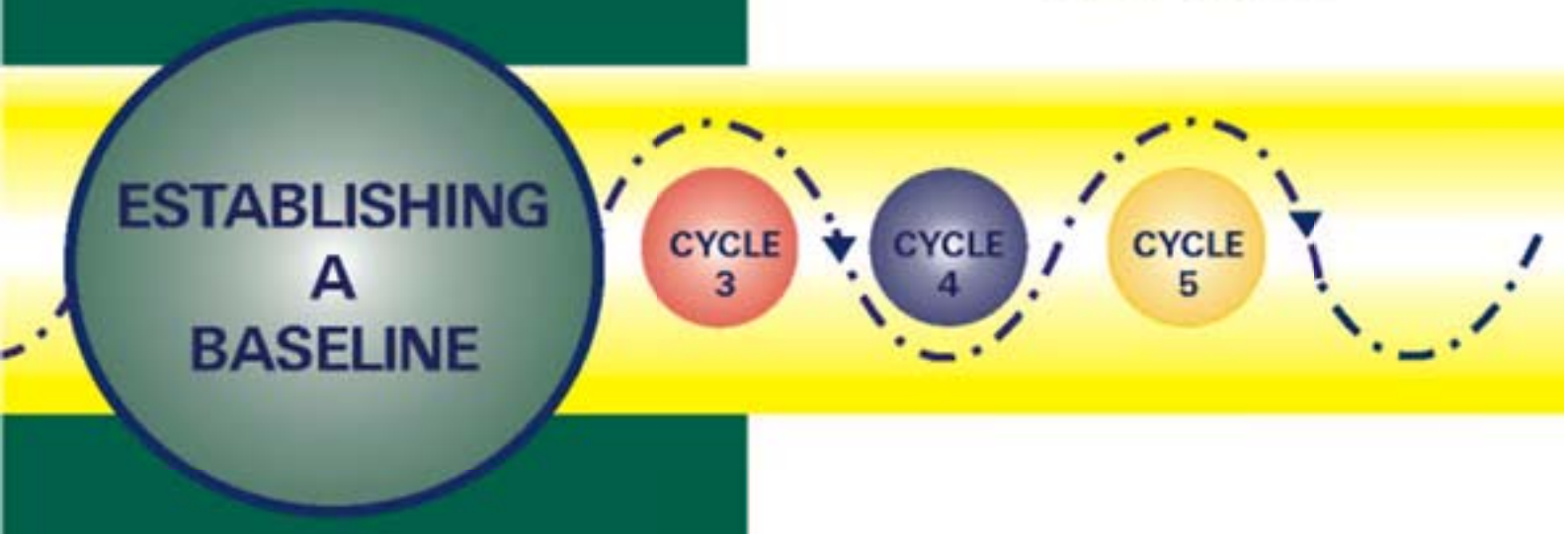
CYCLE 2

SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

ENSURING QUALITY QUALIFICATIONS

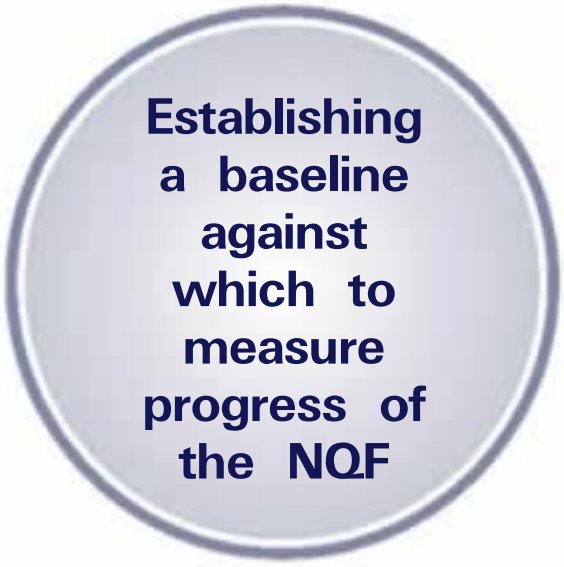
NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK IMPACT STUDY REPORT



2005

National Qualifications Framework
IMPACT STUDY
Report 2

CYCLE 2



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PREFACE

It is my privilege as Chairperson of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to present you with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Impact Study Cycle 2 Report. This report is the second in a series of comparative measurements of the impact of the NQF on the South African education and training conducted by SAQA.

The Cycle 1 Report was released in 2004 and the Cycle 3 Report is due in 2007.

The NQF Impact Study is a world-first. No other country that has implemented an NQF, has as yet, attempted to measure the progress of their NQFs in such a comprehensive and empirical manner. As such, SAQA has set a standard for similar initiatives worldwide and has also provided South African policy makers with a rich source of information that can be used to inform future NQF developments.

On behalf of SAQA, I wish to express sincere gratitude to the European Union (EU) and HEDCO-Ireland for financial and technical support. We also commend the two international experts, Gary Granville from Ireland and Ron Tuck from Scotland, for their commitment to this project over the past three years. In addition, the SAQA Research Team is to be commended for conducting pioneering research that will be invaluable to future NQF development and implementation, both in South Africa, and the numerous other countries that are in the process of developing their own NQFs.

The views expressed in this report are those of the SAQA Research Team and emanate from the findings of the study and are not necessarily those of SAQA. The Research Team takes full responsibility for the research design and would welcome input for its strengthening.

Through the NQF Impact Study we wish to encourage critical engagement with the ways the NQF is being implemented so that the principles of the NQF can be attained in the interest of the majority of citizens.

Shirley Walters
April 2005

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Note: A compact disc containing the full report as well as the annexures and other useful information can be found on the inside back cover. Alternatively, a request can be made to saqainfo@saqa.org.za*.*
In order to improve readability, references to annexures are abbreviated as follows: (1:17), which refers to Annexure 1, page 17, and so forth.

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The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) acknowledges the valuable contribution of the following organisations and individuals:

- NQF stakeholders and partners who participated in interviews, focus groups and a national survey. This includes: learners from a variety of sectors and levels; providers of education and training across all the bands, as well as secondary schools; businesses, both large and small; organised labour; education related agencies; quality assurance bodies, including some professional bodies; standard setting bodies; and government departments, particularly the Departments of Education and Labour.

- The European Union for the financial and technical support for this cycle of the study, as well as for the previous cycle completed in 2004.

- HEDCO-Ireland, with European Union support, for extending Mr Ron Tuck's contract.

- Mr Ron Tuck, who, with his wealth of NQF-related experience across the world, guided the Project Team during Cycle 2 and ensured that the results were well-presented in an accessible format.

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- SAQA, for continuing to encourage intellectual scrutiny by dedicating time and resources to a long-term study of this nature in order to present decision makers and the South African public with validated empirical data of the current state of NQF development and implementation.

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- Members of the NQF Impact Study Advisory Group for support and strategic guidance.

The SAQA Research Team
Ronel Heyns, Ron Tuck, Seamus Needham and James Keevy
April 2005

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

GENERAL

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
CCFO	Critical Cross-Field Outcomes
CHE	Council on Higher Education
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUMSA	Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa
CUP	Committee of University Principals
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DSSD	Directorate for Standards Setting and Development
ELOAC	Exit Level Outcomes and Assessment Criteria
ERS	Education Renewal Strategy
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
GENFET QC	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Quality Assurance Council (proposed)
GET	General Education and Training
HEDCO	Higher Education Development Company (Ireland)
HET	Higher Education and Training
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee (of the CHE)
HI-ED QC	Higher Education and Training Qualifications and Quality Assurance Council (proposed)
HRD	Human Resource Development strategy
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IEB	Independent Examinations Board
IMWG	Inter-Ministerial Working Group
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
NABABET	National Board for Adult Basic Education and Training
NACWC	National Access Consortium Western Cape
NATED	National Education Department
NBFET	National Board for Further Education and Training
NECC	National Education Co-ordinating Committee
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NTB	National Training Board
NUMSA	National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice Chancellors' Association
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SMME	Small-, Medium- and Micro Enterprise
TOP QC	Trade, Occupational and Professional Qualifications and Quality Assurance Council (proposed)

SAQA

ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report is the result of the second cycle of a longitudinal research project commissioned by SAQA. The project aims to *achieve the effective measurement of the impact of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on the transformation of education and training in South Africa*, with reference to the five objectives of the NQF.

2. The first cycle was concerned with establishing the criteria against which to measure the progress of the NQF.

3. The specific objective of this second cycle of the project was to establish the baseline against which to measure progress of the NQF.

4. This report summarises comments that were made on the First Cycle Report. While responses were generally approving in respect of methodology, a helpful critique was also noted.

5. One of the outcomes of Cycle 1 was the development of 17 Indicators that would form the basis for making comparisons over time. These Indicators are:

	Impact Indicator	Definition
Set 1: The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and South African society		
1.	Number of qualifications	The number of NQF registered qualifications
2.	Effectiveness of qualifications design	The contribution that qualifications design makes to ease of access, mobility and progression of learners
3.	Portability of qualifications	The extent to which qualifications facilitate the mobility of learners horizontally, diagonally and vertically
4.	Relevance of qualifications	The relevance of qualifications in relation to the needs of workplace, industry and society at large including non-traditional qualifications (qualifications offered in new and emerging fields of learning)
5.	Qualifications uptake and achievement	The extent to which NQF registered qualifications are offered and the extent of achievement of such qualifications by learners
6.	Integrative approach	The extent to which qualifications promote an integrative approach to education and training and the nature of such qualifications
Set 2: The extent to which the delivery of learning programmes address the education and training needs of learners and the South African society		
7.	Equity of access	The ease of entry and access of traditional and non-traditional learners to education and training including admission requirements and the recognition of prior learning
8.	Redress practices	The extent to which redress practices, including the recognition of prior learning (RPL), facilitate the award of credits and/or access of learners to learning programmes
9.	Nature of learning programmes	The expansion of learning opportunities and the impacts of learning programmes, including an outcomes-based approach to curriculum development and learning and teaching
10.	Quality of learning and teaching	The extent to which learning and teaching practices are responsive to the needs of learners through improved teaching practices
11.	Assessment practices	The fairness, validity, reliability and practicability of the assessment of learning
12.	Career and learning pathing	The extent to which learning programmes support and enhance career and learning pathing

Set 3: The extent to which quality assurance arrangements enhance the effectiveness of education and training		
13.	Number of registered assessors and moderators	The number of skilled assessors and moderators required to support an effective education and training system
14.	Number of accredited providers	The number of education and training providers who meet the quality requirements of the system
15.	Quality assurance practices	The extent to which quality assurance practices enhance the quality of learning, teaching and assessment
Set 4: The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture		
16.	Organisational, economic and societal benefits	The extent to which learner-centredness is embedded in organisational, economic and social environments in order to build a lifelong learning culture that empowers individuals and communities
17.	Contribution to other national strategies	The extent to which the implementation of the NQF supports and contributes to the achievement of national strategies such as the Human Resource Development (HRD), National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and Tirisano

6. In order to establish evidence for the baseline, data collection responsibilities were divided between the SAQA project team and an external contractor. Five sources of evidence were used:

   - The 17 Indicators were used to develop a survey questionnaire, administered by the SAQA team and completed by a sample of stakeholders (determined on a purposive quota sampling basis)
   - The same questionnaire was administered by the external contractor
   - Interviews and focus group meetings were held, involving 122 stakeholders across the nine provinces
   - A quantitative analysis of qualifications and unit standards currently registered on the NQF was conducted, using the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)
   - A qualitative analysis of qualifications in three sectors was conducted by the external contractor

7. The report presents a contextualisation of the NQF and current debates to provide a narrative within which the outcomes of the Impact Study can be interpreted. The key issues are shown to cluster around the themes of *integration* and *leadership and management.* A typology of NQFs is presented, based on the work of international experts. The key elements of this typology are purpose, scope, degree of prescriptiveness, incrementalism, policy breadth, and system features. The typology can be used as a conceptual tool to throw light on the developments of the South African NQF.

8. The evidence from the five sources was collated in respect of each Indicator. An evaluation was then made of the level of impact achieved in respect of each Indicator.

		Level of impact (see table below for clarification)			
		HP	M	MM	N
Set 1: The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and South African society					
1	Number of qualifications		M		
2	Effectiveness of qualifications design			MM	
3	Portability of qualifications			MM	
4	Relevance of qualifications		M		
5	Qualifications uptake and achievement			MM	
6	Integrative approach			MM	
Set 2: The extent to which the delivery of learning programmes addresses the education and training needs of learners and South African society					
7	Equity of access		M		
8	Redress practices			MM	
9	Nature of learning programmes	HP			
10	Quality of learning and teaching		M		
11	Assessment practices		M		
12	Career and learning pathing		M		
Set 3: The extent to which quality assurance arrangements enhance the effectiveness of education and training					
13	Number of registered assessors and moderators			MM	
14	Number of accredited providers			MM	
15	Quality assurance practices			MM	
Set 4: The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture					
16	Organisational, economic and societal benefits	HP			
17	Contribution to other national strategies	HP			

HP: High positive impact	The research evidence shows a marked positive change across most of the education and training system as it pertains to the NQF
M: Moderate impact	The research evidence shows moderate positive change across the education and training system
MM: Minimal/mixed impact	The research evidence shows minimal positive and/or a mix of positive and negative change across the education and training system
N: Negative impact	The research evidence shows a marked negative change across most of the education and training system as it pertains to the NQF

9. The NQF was found to have had a high positive impact in the following areas:

- Nature of learning programmes (#9)
- Organisational, economic and societal benefits (#16)
- Contribution to other national strategies (#17)

Key strengths were: positive impact of an outcomes-based approach to education: learner motivation increased by certification; greater emphasis on application of knowledge and skills, clarity of learning

objectives, enhanced learner autonomy, and a strengthening of quality assurance of programmes; employee empowerment, enhanced self esteem for learners, more awareness of learning opportunities, improved responsiveness on the part of providers; clearer learning pathways; and an alignment with broader national strategies.

10. The NQF was found to have had a moderate positive impact in the following areas:

    - Number of qualifications (#1)
    - Relevance of qualifications (#4)
    - Equity of access (#7)
    - Quality of learning and teaching (#10)
    - Assessment practices (#11)
    - Career and learning pathing (#12)

    Workplace qualifications were seen as particularly relevant. There was criticism of school, university and teacher education qualifications. There was general agreement that qualifications were open to all sectors of society. Encouraging developments in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) were reported, although there were still concerns about the complexity and cost of RPL procedures. More attention was being paid to the needs of learners and to the professional development of education and training practitioners. The quality of assessment had improved, although there were concerns about cumbersome processes. The development of career and learning pathways had also improved.

11. The NQF was found to have had a minimal or mixed impact in the following areas:

    - Effectiveness of qualification design (#2)
    - Qualifications uptake and achievement (#5)
    - Number of registered assessors and moderators (#13)
    - Number of accredited providers (#14)
    - Quality assurance practices (#15)
    - Redress practices (#8)
    - Portability of qualifications (#3)
    - Integrative approach (#6)

12. The findings on qualifications design, although limited to three sectors (Physical Planning and Construction, Mining and Minerals and Hospitality, Travel, Tourism and Gaming) suggests that the broader principles of the NQF are supported. The following focus areas were identified as being relevant to qualifications design:

    - Career mapping and pathways
    - Improved access through flexible entry requirements and RPL
    - Portability and transfer of credits, particularly within specific sectors, but also across sectors
    - Articulation of qualifications with each other
    - Standardisation of qualifications
    - The integration of theory and practice
    - Responsiveness and relevance to workplaces
    - Employability, entrepreneurship and social transformation

13. The level of uptake and achievement is still low, partly because it takes time for learners to complete programmes leading to qualifications, but also because of the slow progress in registration of assessors and moderators and accreditation of providers. These problems in turn are attributed, by the majority of respondents, to deficiencies in the quality assurance system. There is strong support for the idea of quality standards and a belief that quality assurance is improving.

14. The key problems affecting quality assurance are said to be:

- Lack of progress with Memoranda of Understanding
- Legislative anomalies, giving rise to dual accreditation
- Lack of trust
- Overlapping responsibilities of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs)
- Distorting influence of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) on the system
- The Department of Education's (DoE) "lack of understanding of non-formal education"
- Quality assurance mechanisms being set up for the sake of compliance rather than to improve quality
- Uncertainty about the need for registration with the DoE

15. Portability of qualifications continues to be seen as problematic. Respondents identified two key problems:

- The quality of qualifications is still often felt to reside in the institution rather than in the standards
- Institutional practices - the unwillingness of certain sectors of education or training to trust the qualifications gained in other sectors

16. It is also thought that there has been little progress on redress. This is largely attributable to the lack of impact of RPL. While learners are starting to be able to obtain NQF credits through RPL, they do not yet seem to be able to use these credits as a route into further and higher education.

17. The findings on an integrative approach echo those on portability and redress. Moving between academic and vocational qualifications remains difficult; there is no parity of esteem for vocational education; and co-operation between formal education and the world of work and training remains limited.

18. The findings on portability, redress, and integrative approach suggest a need, stressed in the international literature, to consider 'institutional logics' and develop 'communities of trust'.

19. There was no instance where the bulk of the research evidence, associated with a specific Indicator, showed a marked negative change across the education and training system. As a result no Indicator was rated as negative. This is not say that no negative evidence was found, but rather that such evidence was dispersed across the indicators with no particular indicator being completely influenced by it.

20. Further research is recommended in respect of some Indicators, particularly those where the detail of institutional practice and the quality of the learners' experience needs to be understood more clearly.

21. The results of the Impact Study suggest that there are four key areas for development (possibly with some associated research):

- Simplification of assessment
- Clarification and simplification of responsibilities for quality assurance
- Development of communities of trust
- Clarification of the integrative intentions of the NQF