CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The project brief

This report is the result of the second cycle of a longitudinal research project commissioned by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The project, envisaged as a long-term continuous exercise, 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 stated objectives of the NQF itself, which are to:

1. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2. facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The first cycle was concerned with establishing the criteria against which to measure the progress of the NQF. The specific objective of this second cycle of the project was to *establish the baseline against which to measure progress of the NQF.*

This chapter sets out the research design of the Impact Study, summarises the outcomes of Cycle 1, and outlines the structure of this Cycle 2 Report.

The research design of the NQF Impact Study

This research design is illustrated in the diagram below.

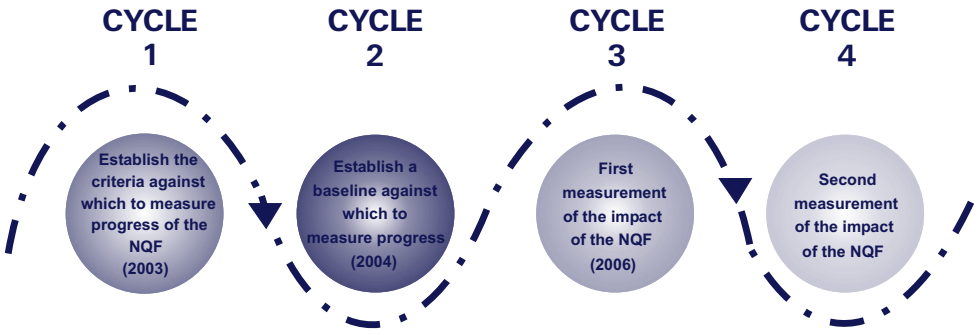

Diagram 1: Overview of the research design of the NQF Impact Study

The NQF Impact Study is bounded by certain assumptions and limitations. First, the NQF objectives are taken as a given. There is no attempt to evaluate the rationale for these objectives or to question whether these are the most appropriate objectives for South Africa.

Second, the Study is undertaken in the knowledge that definitive judgements on the attainment of NQF objectives cannot be made with any degree of finality for a number of years. Cycle 1 produced only indicative findings. Cycle 2 has resulted in some clear findings but in many cases, stakeholders are still saying that it is 'too soon to say'.

Third and this is a related point - the emphasis in Cycles 1 and 2 has been on establishing firm foundations for a long-term longitudinal study. The drawing of firm conclusions is becoming more important but will only be fully achieved once the Cycle 3 results (planned for 2007) are compared with the Cycle 2 baseline data.

The specific objective of the first cycle of the project was to establish the criteria against which to measure the progress of the NQF. It was concerned with the development of Impact Indicators for use in the measurement of the extent of achievement of the objectives of the NQF. The first cycle of the Study generated a range of quantitative and qualitative data in respect of all the draft Impact Indicators, using a range of instruments. The annexures to the Cycle 1 report contained the detailed data in respect of the various elements of the research, including the application of research methods with stakeholder groupings. Some indicative findings were presented in the Cycle 1 Report and these are reproduced in Appendix 1.

The research methodology proved generally effective. A process of contextualisation was undertaken, drawing on available sources of external evidence. Twenty-three Impact Indicators, based on the five NQF objectives, were piloted through a process of consultation with stakeholders. Their fitness for purpose was tested, leading to a revised set of seventeen Impact Indicators as set out below.

Set 1: The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and South African society	
1	Number of qualifications
2	Effectiveness of qualifications design
3	Portability of qualifications
4	Relevance of qualifications
5	Qualifications uptake and achievement
6	Integrative approach
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
8	Redress practices
9	Nature of learning programmes
10	Quality of learning and teaching
11	Assessment practices
12	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
14	Number of accredited providers
15	Quality assurance practices
Set 4: The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a culture of lifelong learning	
16	Organisational, economic and societal benefits
17	Contribution to other national strategies

Table 1: Impact Indicators

A full list of findings intended to inform the future Cycles of the Impact Study is set out in Appendix 2.

Responses to Cycle 1 Report

The First Cycle Report was launched at the SAQA Chairperson's Lecture in September 2004. The Lecture, delivered by Professor Granville, was entitled 'National Qualifications Framework and the Shaping of a New South Africa: Indications of the NQF in Practice'. He outlined the methods and findings of the Impact Study, arguing that it was a predominantly democratic evaluation. He went on to discuss the dangers of instrumentalism, the changing national and international context of implementation, and the assessment of levels of impact.

Professor Jonathan Jansen responded first, arguing that the NQF promised what it could not achieve, was compromised from the beginning by the separation of the two Departments (Education and Labour), lacked a credible theory of action, and was engulfed by a powerful bureaucratic apparatus. With regard to the NQF Impact Study he said:

> The Impact Study project of SAQA is easily one of the most sophisticated measurement and monitoring systems that I have yet witnessed to emerge in South Africa. Its sophistication lies in its self-critical posture and its consciousness of the limits and potential of impact studies, especially in its more quantitative conception.

A second response was delivered by Mr Botshabelo Maja, who discussed the key debates that shaped the design of the NQF and how to contextualise impact within these debates in a way that would avoid simply 'perpetuating our own logic'. He then focused on the fourth set, namely '*the extent to which South African society has accepted lifelong learning*'. In his view, this set is a key and central indicator to the NQF process (after piloting in Cycle 1, this set changed to '*the extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture*'). The core of the NQF system, he said enable South Africa and its citizens to participate competitively in an ever-changing globalised world.

Subsequent to the Chairperson's Lecture, a paper was produced by Mr Edward French entitled 'Those Unheard … A Review of the Presentations on the Occasion of the Chairperson's Lecture'. It contained a thoughtful and well-argued critique of the Impact Study. He argued that 'the lecture's very self-awareness, its magisterial grasp of all the issues, its understanding of ironies and limitations, anticipated voices of protest, of difference, even of eager support and assent ..and in this way it silenced them.'

Mr French questions why the Impact Study did not address the fundamental political and legislative issues that have influenced its development.

> The question is: would a Machiavellian analysis of the management of the play of power and influence around the NQF not be revealing, and of great importance to an impact study? For example, if there is justice in Professor Jansen's point that the impact of the NQF has been limited because the NQF has become unnecessarily complicated, which (stakeholder) pressures, arguments and interests have pushed it in that direction?

The paper also poses some methodological questions for the Impact Study:

> There was general admiration for the team's … professionalism and thoughtfulness in their approach to the NQF Impact Study. However, although Professor Granville mentions many complexities, potential pitfalls, value orientations to be guarded against and so on, in the last resort he (and the team) could be said to opt for an approach that could be called technicist or managerialist (with reservations). Such approaches tend to aim to be apolitical and "value-free". Their main source of evidence would seem to be market opinion and self-report questionnaire surveys. What one misses is any weighing up of alternative approaches to the study. Professor Jansen (very politely hiding the fact that he is doing so) implicitly recommends some interesting alternatives. At the heart of his recommendation is the use of studies of how the NQF is being implemented, or evaded, in terms of the practices, institutional arrangements and individual responses. For example: How have curricula been changing, and to what extent is the change due to the NQF? How is assessment being managed? How have previously marginalised learners been taken up in education and training in ways that recognise and valorise new knowledge? In what ways are different forms of knowledge being allowed to flow together into qualifications? Such questions are implicit in the sets of indicators, but it may be that cumulative, persuasive, in-depth narratives of the multiple, varied real-life responses to the transformative challenge of the NQF, backed by national, regional and sectoral statistics, would be more telling than indicators?

Two other papers have been produced as an offshoot of the NQF Impact Study. An Integrated National Framework for Education and Training in South Africa: Exploring the Issues (Heyns and Needham, 2004) traces the debate on the concept of the integration of education and training and identifies the key systemic blockages to the conceptualisation and implementation of an integrated system.

The relevance of the NQF Impact Study to Qualifications Framework Development in SADC (Tuck, Hart and Keevy, 2004) reviews the international debate on national qualifications frameworks and begins to develop a typology of NQFs.

Cycle 2 Process

Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study aimed to establish a baseline against which to measure the progress of the NQF. Although the research design and methodology are discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this report, a brief summary is included here, particularly for those readers who may prefer to move directly to Chapters 3 or 4.

The seventeen Impact Indicators, developed during Cycle 1, were used to develop a questionnaire (see Annexure 9) that was completed by randomly selected NQF stakeholders such as providers of education and training, the Departments of Education and Labour, employers, organised labour, quality assurance and standards setting bodies, and learners. In order to ensure adequate triangulation of these responses five different modes of investigation were used:

(1) The SAQA Research Unit interviewed 122 stakeholders across the nine provinces - the interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analysed (see Annexures 2-6);
(2) Of the 122 individuals interviewed, 77 also completed the questionnaire - their responses were captured and analysed (see Annexure 1);
(3) An independent provider was contracted to conduct a national survey, using the same questionnaire - 501 responses were captured and analysed independently from the SAQA interviews (see Annexure 8);
(4) *Quantitative* analysis of all qualifications on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) was undertaken by SAQA (Annexure 7); and
(5) *Qualitative* analysis of qualifications in three sectors (mining, tourism and construction) was carried out by an external provider (also part of Annexure 8).

The research evidence has been included in full in the Annexures to ensure transparency and facilitate replicability. The project team comprised not only members of SAQA's Research Unit but also two international experts: Ron Tuck, previously Chief Executive of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and Professor Gary Granville, Head of the Education Faculty in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. The role of the international experts was to provide external professional scrutiny. An Advisory Group, comprising SAQA members and management, oversaw the work of the project team. The Advisory Group met on three occasions during Cycle 2.

Report Structure for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study

Chapter 2 describes the methodology adopted by the Project Team in gathering the baseline data.

Chapter 3 outlines the origins of the NQF and describes current issues of NQF implementation both in South Africa and internationally. It defines a context for interpreting and using findings from the NQF Impact Study.

Chapter 4 sets out the findings, i.e. the data that will serve as the baseline for future Impact Study Cycles.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the second Cycle.

Five appendices are included with the report and contain background information that may be of interest to specific stakeholders.

A series of eleven annexures accompany the report. These underpin the findings by giving more detailed accounts of the analyses by SAQA and the external contractor. Annexure 9 contains the questionnaire used for the national survey.The annexures are available in electronic format only, as they contain detailed information that may not be useful to all stakeholders. The views expressed in the annexures are not necessarily those of SAQA.