



**MINISTER
HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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Dear Dr Mabizela

**GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF), 2011/12**

I am required by the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 to provide political direction on the implementation of the NQF by means of guidelines on strategy and priorities.

The attached document has been prepared by the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee and workshopped with SAQA and the Quality Councils in the NQF Forum and its CEO Committee. I appreciate all the advice provided.

I now have pleasure in approving and issuing the guidelines. I request you to ensure that they are taken into account in your corporate planning and implementation.

I anticipate that the guidelines will be updated annually in connection with the planning and budget cycle of SAQA and the QCs.

Yours sincerely

DR BE NZIMANDE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

DATE: 08/08/11

cc. Dr Mafu S Rakometsi
Chief Executive Officer, Umalusi

GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF), 2011/12

This document

1. This document sets out government's strategy and priorities for the NQF as required by section 8(2)(c) of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (No. 67 of 2008) (the NQF Act). It covers the period to 31 March 2012.
2. The NQF Act assigns executive responsibility for the entire NQF system to the Minister of Higher Education and Training. The Minister has determined these guidelines after consultation with the Minister of Basic Education.
3. The guidelines give direction to the work of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the three Quality Councils (QCs): the Quality Council on Trades and Occupations (QCTO), Umalusi and the Council on Higher Education (CHE).
4. The guidelines will be updated annually. The intention is to ensure over time that the plans and budgets of the NQF bodies fully reflect the government's strategic approach and annual priorities.
5. SAQA and the QCs have provided invaluable advice during the preparation of these guidelines, especially through the NQF Forum and its CEO Committee.

Strategic considerations

6. Strengthening the nation's education, skills and human resource base is one of the government's highest priorities for the current period. This was declared in the President's State of the Nation address at the opening of Parliament on 3 June 2009. It was stated again in the government's *Medium-Term Strategic Framework, 2009-2014*, and re-iterated emphatically in the government's *New Growth Path: the Framework (2010)*.
7. "Stepping up education and skills development" is programme four in the New Growth Path's (NGP) development policy package for growth, decent work, and equity:
Improvements in education and skill levels are a fundamental prerequisite for achieving many of the goals in this growth path. General education must equip all South Africans to participate in our democracy and economy, and higher education must do more to meet the needs of broad-based development. The growth path also requires a radical review of the training system to address shortfalls in artisanal and technical skills.
8. The Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa addresses these goals, and the National Skills Development Strategy 3 focuses on meeting the particular shortfalls identified in the NGP for engineers, artisans, workplace skills, further education and training and ICT.
9. The creation of two dedicated departments for Basic Education and for Higher Education and Training respectively illustrates the government's commitment to the delivery of its strategic education and skills objectives. The Performance Agreements signed with the

President by the Ministers of Basic Education and of Higher Education and Training are fully aligned with government's strategic priorities.

10. The achievement of the government's strategic goals will be meaningful only if the quality of education and occupational skills is simultaneously elevated throughout the national learning system. The nation requires strong and well-functioning education institutions and occupational skills providers that provide access to credible, quality assured qualifications.
11. The National Qualifications Framework, which was a major initiative of the Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994, is South Africa's chosen mechanism for setting appropriate and rigorous standards for qualifications and quality assurance and for widening access to education and occupational opportunities.
12. From the outset the NQF has been a national project with developmental objectives that relies on social dialogue and is driven by thousands of engaged stakeholders and specialists across all social and economic sectors. The 2007 Joint Policy Statement (JPS) on "Enhancing the Efficacy and Efficiency of the National Qualifications Framework" issued by the Ministers of Education and Labour observed that,

"Since 1995, the National Qualifications Framework has become an essential instrument in the construction of a high quality, responsive South African education, training and skills development system that serves our democracy and social and economic development."
13. The NQF Act, 2008 embodies the policy set out in the JPS and re-models the NQF institutional landscape to achieve greater efficacy and efficiency in the management of a high-quality, responsive, developmental national qualifications system.
14. SAQA and the three Quality Councils are therefore well positioned by history, experience and mandate to ensure that the NQF succeeds. They have signalled their commitment by signing the National Skills Summit Declaration of 10 September 2010.

Priorities for the period to 31 March 2012

15. This statement of priorities identifies the elements that must receive the most concentrated attention in the next period.

Underlying priorities

16. Two priorities underlie all others in the period to March 2012.
17. The first is the need for the Minister to determine the three sub-frameworks on SAQA's advice according to the letter and spirit of the NQF Act, 2008. This requires each QC to finalise the development (or, in the case of the Council on Higher Education, the revision) of its sub-framework in coordination with the other QCs. The articulation between Further Education and Training, Higher Education and Occupational qualifications is particularly vital for the government's programme. The QCs need to advise on:
 - 1) the essential character of each sub-framework;
 - 2) the demarcation between each sub-framework; and
 - 3) the basis on which sub-frameworks articulate with one another.

18. SAQA must lead this process in collaboration with the QCs, as indeed it has begun to do in the NQF Forum.
19. The second major priority is a review of NQF policy and legislation. The Minister is required to determine policy for the NQF. The Joint Policy Statement of the Ministers of Education and Labour (2007) provided the basis for the NQF Act, 2008, but the re-organisation of government in 2009, the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education, and the respective Ministerial Performance Agreements with the President, have radically altered the conditions under which the objectives of the NQF are interpreted and implemented.
20. The Department of Higher Education and Training, working with the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee, will lead the review of NQF policy and legislation. The Steering Committee will work closely with the NQF Forum and the CEO Committee. Amendments to legislation must be included in the 2012 legislative programme.

Managing transition

21. Two major transitions have impacted heavily on SAQA and the QCs: from the SAQA Act, 1995 to the NQF Act, 2008; and from the previous departmental arrangements to the new DHET and DBE. Planning and executing the transitions has already been a work of several years. The remaining transitional tasks must be managed thoroughly and efficiently, without interruption in service delivery.

System of collaboration

22. The system of collaboration is a fundamental requirement of the new NQF arrangements for which SAQA is responsible (NQF Act, s. 13(1)(f)(i)). The system of collaboration will guide mutual relations among SAQA and the QCs. It must also take into account the Regulations for Resolving a Dispute in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Government Notice No. R.743 of 27 August 2010). The regulations require collegial action to prevent or minimise the effect of disputes among SAQA and the QCs. They also ensure that any dispute is settled quickly in order to avoid unnecessary damage to the NQF project.
23. The NQF Forum and its CEO Committee are a core element of the system of collaboration. They must continue as forums for frank discussion; for consultation on joint actions, overlapping responsibilities and potential disagreements; for collective agreement on important aspects of NQF implementation; and for mutual accountability.
24. The system of collaboration should be reflected in a document which SAQA updates from time to time in the light of experience.

NQF implementation framework

25. The completion of the implementation framework is another urgent requirement of the NQF Act. The Act requires SAQA to prepare the framework after consultation with the QCs (s. 13(1)(e)). The framework is the basis on which SAQA fulfils its responsibility to oversee the implementation of the NQF. Mechanisms, dates, broad resource and capacity requirements and lines of accountability must be specified.
26. The transitional arrangements contemplated in section 36 of the NQF Act, 2008 and section 6 of Schedule 2A of the Skills Development Act, 2008 must become redundant

as soon as practically possible. The implementation framework should identify the processes by which that will happen.

27. While all the NQF bodies are in the process of adjusting organisational structures, personnel establishments and budgets to the demands of the new legislation, the QCTO is in the unique position of having to create its structures, recruit its staff (including its CEO), achieve financial viability and perform its statutory functions almost from scratch. The implementation framework should give particular attention to the processes by which the QCTO will assume its position as a fully self-managing QC.
28. The framework should provide for continuity of service to all NQF stakeholders and clients during the transition period and ensure that accurate and timely information about the transition is made available to all NQF stakeholders and clients.
29. The implementation framework should explain by what mechanisms SAQA will oversee the implementation of the NQF, bearing in mind the respective statutory powers of SAQA and the QCs and the system of collaboration. Particular attention should be paid to the mechanisms required to coordinate the three sub-frameworks of the NQF.
30. How QCs intend to manage their standard setting and quality assurance processes should be treated as a priority in the NQF implementation framework.

Particularly urgent delivery requirements

31. While all statutory functions must be performed, the following delivery requirements of SAQA and the QCs collectively are especially important in the current period. They deal with the fundamental NQF components of standards setting, quality assurance, progression and information. Important progress is being made in all these areas but the following milestones must be reached in the current period. If for good reason it is not possible to reach a particular milestone before the end of March 2012, it is imperative that this is brought to the attention of the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee and the NQF Forum.
32. The new **standards setting arrangements** should be completed and put into operation. Agreement between SAQA and the QCs on a full set of level descriptors should not be delayed. As already indicated, the development and coordination of the three sub-frameworks (including the review of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)) should be finalised and submitted to the Minister for approval. Policy and criteria for qualifications and part-qualifications should be developed, approved and implemented. Although the alignment of existing qualifications with the new sub-frameworks is likely to take some time, this work should be planned and proceeded with systematically. Where required, delegations by QCs to competent standards setting bodies must be developed and put into operation. It is particularly important for QCs to ensure that an appropriate suite of national qualifications and part qualifications is in place as soon as possible to serve the nation's education and skills priorities. SAQA needs to determine policy and criteria for recognising a professional body and registering a professional designation, which are vital parts of the standards setting arrangements.
33. The new **quality assurance arrangements** should be completed and put into operation. Where this has not been done, the QCs must develop and implement policy

and criteria for quality assurance within their respective sub-frameworks. Where necessary, delegations by QCs to competent quality assurance bodies must be developed and put into operation.

34. The new **progression arrangements** for learners should be completed and put into operation. Mechanisms for ensuring that competent learners and workers are able to progress within the learning system and along their chosen career paths are particularly important if the national human resource development priorities are to be met. This will require system-wide articulation and equivalence arrangements to be put in place. Policy and criteria for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer also have strategic importance and must be given appropriate priority.
35. The **information arrangements** are of vital strategic importance to the whole NQF system and have equal priority with the others. Attention should be paid in the current period to the quality assurance of information processes; in particular to security and verification of source data on learner records. The necessity for timely and accurate information to be made available to stakeholders and the public, especially on transitional arrangements, needs renewed emphasis. The national careers advisory service is a new information initiative entrusted by government to the NQF system which has very high value to the post-school constituency.

Monitoring

36. As part of its oversight responsibility for the NQF, SAQA is requested to monitor progress in the work associated with these priorities and give timely advice to the NQF Forum and CEO Committee on issues that impede implementation.