Options for the Quality Assurance of Assessment in the TVET Sector:

Research Report

29 October 2003

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted to assist Umalusi in developing procedures and policies for the quality assurance of assessment in technical and vocational education. Section 2 of the document summarises the main findings of the research, and provides suggestions and recommendations, both in terms of possible approaches to the quality assurance of assessment, and in terms of other related issues which Umalusi will need to address, or have some role in resolving. Section 3 discusses the approach to quality assurance and the research methodology which informed this study. Section 4 provides an overview of the policy context of the quality assurance of assessment, and discusses some of the pertinent policies and recent developments (such as the release of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Consultative Document by the Departments of Education and Labour). It also discusses where policy matters are unresolved or problematic. Section 5 of the document provides a detailed report of the case studies conducted in Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, in order to gain a better understanding of assessment practices in the sector. Section 6 discusses the findings of a questionnaire which was sent to all public colleges, in order to gain a quantitative perspective on assessment practices. Section 7 discusses the findings of a questionnaire sent to private institutions, and Section 8 a case study of one private provider. Appendix A contains the questionnaire sent to the colleges, and Appendix B contains the research protocols used for the case studies.

This document deals mainly with the public providers. The section on private provision was a limited study, and is not a sufficient base from which to make decisions. It does, however, start to paint a picture of what is happening in some private institutions, and provides a useful starting point for further work in this area.

As we point out in the discussion on policy, the Department of Education[1] is seen as the provider in terms of public vocational education. As such, the role of maintaining quality assurance systems belongs to the Department, and Umalusi's role is to verify that this is done in an adequate way. However, Umalusi also has a role to play in stipulating what it regards as adequate. Ideally, the system would be jointly designed by the Department and Umalusi, as Umalusi will have to monitor the Department's implementation. In other words, Umalusi can suggest policies or procedures that it would like the Department of Education to develop and comply with. Provincial departments are responsible for developing guidelines and resources for colleges where appropriate. The key issue for Umalusi will be choosing what to look at. For example, Umalusi could look at an occasional sample of colleges, to see whether, in their judgment, sites of delivery of the provinces are complying with the provinces' guidelines and policies. In this regard, what

[1] In this report when we refer to the Department of Education we are referring to the entire Department, including the national and provincial departments, unless otherwise specified.

will be regarded as basic minimum standards, for compliance, and what will be regarded as desirable best practice, to work towards, can be stipulated.

Our key recommendation is for Umalusi, for the present, to focus its attention on the moderation of common assessment tasks and national examinations, and thereafter take an advocacy role in assisting the Department of Education as the provider to put necessary procedures in place that will assure the development of quality of assessment practices. Further findings are given as options for consideration and possible prioritisation.

In general, private technical and vocational education is a vast field, and this report was unable to deal with it in more detail. This document does make recommendations about private providers, where systemic recommendations designed for the public sector could play a role in the private sector. The information obtained on private provision shows, however, that there are very many similarities between the issues facing the public colleges, and the issues in the private institutions. The brief investigation of the private sector also revealed how much more information is needed, before meaningful decisions can be taken.

This document is described as focusing on the quality assurance of assessment in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector. However, the release of the NQF Consultative Report suggests different terminology, in its suggestion of three clearly demarcated pathways within the education and training sector—general, general vocational, and trade, occupational, and professional (TOP). We have used this newly suggested terminology where appropriate.

Intended audience

This report is aimed at Umalusi, its staff and Council, in order to help it identify priorities for processes and procedures pertaining to the quality assurance of assessment, on the basis of an analysis of current assessment practices.

Research aims

This research aimed to include the following:

1. An analysis of an email questionnaire on current assessment strategies in the sector sent to both public and private FET colleges.
2. A description and analysis of current assessment strategies in the sector, based on case studies of institutions.
3. An analysis of possibilities for the improvement of current practice created by the new policies and structures.
4. An analysis of key issues arising.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

These options derive from the research findings and are positioned in a concept of quality assurance that implies a developmental approach to quality provision.

Fitness for purpose: the purpose of general vocational education

Umalusi needs to assist in the development of a shared understanding of general vocational education

The recently released NQF Consultative Document (Departments of Education and Labour 2003) stresses the need for three separate pathways within education and training: general; general vocational; and trade, occupational, and professional. Umalusi's work in TVET will be with general vocational programmes. However, as the Departments of Education and Labour (2003) point out, while there is relative clarity on the first and third pathways, the general vocational is not clearly defined, and tends to be underdeveloped and under-recognized in South Africa. This is corroborated by the case studies in the colleges, where there is a definite lack of clarity of purpose. This is particularly important because in order to assure qualifications and programmes, and consequently assessment, as 'fit for purpose', there needs to be an understanding of what the purpose is.

The Departments of Education and Labour (2003) suggest that general vocational describes a wide range of programmes that offer learners a broad-based orientation to employment skills, some specialized training, and sufficient academic education to prepare them for admission to higher education if they so choose; as such, general vocational education often involves learning the underpinning theory required for a 'skills application', but not the 'application competence' itself. They argue that this pathway is not supposed to equip learners with occupational competence, since that requires supervised practice in the workplace. Of course, the word 'some' does not provide clarity about where the line will be drawn between general vocational on the one hand and trade, occupational, and professional on the other. A possible way of differentiating between the two would be to see general vocational as including programmes in which institutional learning comprises at least 60% of learners' time, and trade, occupational, and professional programmes as those in which work-place learning takes up at least 60% of the learners' time. Institutional learning in this regard would need to be understood as learning that is directed and driven by the institution, as opposed to simply learning that takes place at the institution, otherwise distance education programmes (such those offered by a distance institution) could never be considered general vocational. There are also various programmes in which the learner might spend a considerable amount of time in a workplace, but the learning programme is designed and assessed by the institution. A problem which will have to be clarified is where simulated workplaces, such as hairdressing salons in a college, fit.

This approach provides Umalusi with some guidance, but it is clear that more thought needs to go into building a shared understanding of this term, particularly because the findings of this research process indicate that many colleges see themselves as primarily fitted within the trade, occupational, and professional pathway, as opposed to the general vocational; Umalusi and the Departments of Education and Labour on the other hand see them as primarily in the general vocational pathway.

Clarity on the general vocational qualifications and learning programmes is needed urgently

There is great frustration about the lack of clarity in terms of the revision of the NATED 191 and 190 reports. There is a wide-spread feeling that the current programmes are highly inadequate from a range of points of view; colleges feel that they are not recognized by industry, and that learners would rather take the new qualifications. The recommendation in the NQF Consultative Document (Departments of Education and Labour 2003) that all qualifications must contain a minimum of 120 credits also has implications for the current college offerings, many of which are relatively short programmes. It is becoming increasingly urgent that the Department of Education makes progress with the new curriculum framework for colleges, and that this is communicated to colleges. Whether or not colleges offer programmes from a revamped NATED list, or whether they are able to offer some of the 'new' qualifications (and some are investing considerable time in the development of new qualifications), there needs to be clarity in terms of what exactly will be prescribed nationally or provincially; colleges need to know whether or not they will be given a prescribed syllabus; or what the level of prescribed requirements will be.

There is a need for an advocacy role in the colleges and in the country generally for general vocational programmes

If colleges are to offer a majority of general vocational qualifications, they need to be convinced about the value of such programmes. There is a perception in many colleges that trade, occupational, and professional qualifications have more value, are desired by industry, and are desired by learners. There is also a perception that these qualifications are more financially viable in the long term. The current situation is clearly unhealthy in terms of the morale of the sector, as institutions believe they are offering some qualifications which are 'empty'. While there are clearly strong arguments for the role of less specialised and more formative vocational programmes, particularly for young people, these need to be clearly articulated, and quality learning programmes need to be developed.

Colleges are in a difficult position in this debate; they are not sure whether their alignment should be to the Department of Education or industry. It is very clear that they are feeling outmanoeuvred by private providers, who are able to offer what they perceive as more 'relevant' qualifications, and are able to be accredited by the SETAs (though some private institutions report delays in accreditation). There is a general perception in the colleges that the new qualifications are better than the old one. This seems partly to

be because of a greater practical component, and partly because of a perception that a qualification which is quality assured by a SETA will get learners jobs on qualifying.

Perhaps more debate and discussion is needed about the extent to which colleges should be providing general vocational as opposed to trade, occupational, and professional qualifications, which Umalusi could play a role in stimulating within the Department of Education.

Full qualifications should be issued without workplace competence

The NQF Consultative Report suggests that general vocational programmes will not entail a workplace component. There is frustration in the system caused by the fact that the current stipulations do not allow certain certificates to be awarded without workplace experience. It is suggested that this requirement be formally dropped for general vocational qualifications.

The role and organization of trade, occupationally specific, and professional qualifications in the colleges must be discussed and resolved

The logic of the NQF Consultative Report is that colleges will not in general offer such qualifications, as this pathway is conceived of as workplace-based (there could, however, be a specific role for distance institutions in this regard). However, what is not clear is the status of the 'new' qualifications, which are currently quality assured by the SETAs. Will these all be regarded as TOP qualifications? Will colleges play a role in delivering learnerships, for example? Will all qualifications which have some amount of workplace-based learning be considered as TOP qualifications? Some colleges are putting enormous amounts of resources into cooperative efforts (with SETAs and industries) of designing learnerships, and consideration needs to be given to the future of such work.

There are many colleges which are trying to be innovative and offer market related programmes and many of the attempts at innovative practice are funded by SETAs. Colleges see themselves in relation to the private institutions, who they see as cashing in on occupationally specific courses that they struggle to offer because of the problems in the system. However, they see themselves as succeeding in the long term because they can offer much cheaper courses than the privates. From the private college perspective, harder work is required because they have to compete with the public college sector deemed accredited.

The colleges which have ventured into offering the new qualifications feel that SETAs should be playing a moderating role, and Umalusi verifying. If some of these qualifications were viewed as general vocational qualifications, this might be a workable arrangement, although, under the new recommendations of the Departments of Education and Labour, this would be done through the TOP QC.

In particular, one of the issues which Umalusi will need to consider is whether or not it should make stipulations about assessment and quality assurance of TOP qualifications if they are going to be FETCs, which Umalusi will have to issue.

Umalusi could assist in a systemic discussion to resolve the issue of the qualify assurance of the fundamentals

Umalusi's position around the fundamentals and the fact that it does not see itself as quality assuring the fundamentals in certificates issued by other ETQAs, is discussed below in section three. However, there is still likely to be lack of clarity and confusion in this area, and it is likely to be a source of contestation for some time to come. To some extent the matter needs to be resolved at the level of qualifications and programme design, from which assessment and quality assurance should flow. However, Umalusi could play a role in facilitating discussion on the matter. The recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document emphasise whole qualifications, which might to some extent clear up the problems in this area, but there is likely to be a demand for adult learners in particular to be able to accumulate credit, and therefore to obtain credit for parts of qualifications. The NQF Consultative Document also says in the general vocational pathway the learners will only get an exit certificate at level four, but that they can get transcripts or report cards of their learning achievements by subject at level 2 and 3 respectively; there is thus only one exit point. This might also need to be given more consideration.

One solution to this is to ensure that there are systemic assessments of packages of credits, grouped as 'subjects'. This is how it currently words in ABET; learners are able to obtain credits for individual subjects, through ABET examinations at level one, and through the current schooling examinations at level four. The credit for these subjects is quality assured by Umalusi, as learners are taking part in a systemic assessment which is in general organised for people who are trying to obtain a whole qualification. There is a significant difference, however, between this and a system whereby providers award learners credit against unit standards, with assessment done at a site-based level. Firstly, the unit standards are clustered into a 'subject'; learners do not obtain credits for individual standards. Secondly, learners write nationally set exams.

It is generally considered undesirable for all learners to have to study languages with exactly the same syllabuses that are prescribed in schooling, including, for example, a heavy literature component. But this does not mean that there is no possibility of some kind of externally set exam or assessment. A possible recommendation which Umalusi could be making is for the design of national external assessments, which learners could write. This could be done under the auspices of a SETA, on a national basis, or by the Department of Labour, or by recognized national assessment bodies such as the IEB.

Quality assurance of assessment should be incorporated into line functions

There is a tendency in some colleges to see quality assurance as a purchasable system that requires technical implementation. Some colleges have put scarce resources into obtaining such systems, and then are not sure what to do with them. At the same time, this research shows that colleges in general have various checks and balances in place in terms of provision and assessment. These are not always recognised as part of a quality

assurance system. Instead of building on their existing systems, they feel the need for something external, or something purchasable, that is called a Total Quality Management System. An understanding of quality assurance needs to be developed which incorporates the usual line functions of the work of staff at various levels, in the context of an overarching strategic plan. Umalusi could also investigate some of these systems that have been purchased, and evaluate their usefulness.

This recommendation is based on an understanding of quality assurance which builds on existing systems and practices. There were consciously articulated and fairly rigorous processes to control and monitor assessment practices in a number of institutions. In addition, there was a clear desire for measured rather than sweeping changes in colleges, and this seems a sensible way to proceed. There was a clear sense within the colleges that in many places chain-of-command systems are in place, and reports do get tabled about practices at various levels of the institution. In addition, there was a sense from some institutions that the benefits derived from assessor training could only be judged through heads of department; accountability of assessors in this regard would be more important in improving practice than simply sending people on training. There was also a sense that such systems could be used to ensure that conflicts are dealt with; for example, a conflict over assessment would go to a head of department; failure to resolve it at this level would mean that it would go to the campus head. If there is a problem with an external assessor, the provider could go directly to the relevant quality assurance authority. While working through line functions would enable Umalusi to build on existing practice, it could also record decisions taken in response to crises, and thus build precedents over time.

Ensuring that all staff at all levels of institutions are reporting in written form to the staff member above them, and getting feedback and support from this person, will not only provide Umalusi with necessary evidence for the monitoring of assessment, but will also facilitate processes of institutional audits, whereby colleges must demonstrate their capacity in having competent individuals to conduct assessments according to acceptable standards and conditions, and systems of managing the quality of assessment.

Some possible mechanisms that Umalusi could develop which build on line-functions are suggested below.

Umalusi could require the keeping of portfolios of office

In general the research showed that most institutions discuss assessment and results, and submit reports about examinations. This is generally seen as a bit tedious but worthwhile. Staff at various levels of the system could be required to maintain portfolios in which they record evidence of their work, their systems, et cetera. This would not necessarily involve additional work (beyond occasionally making photocopies of documents), but would ensure that records of proceedings were kept in a specific place, and would be available to occasional scrutiny. For example, assessors (which probably includes all lecturers) could be required to keep copies of assessment tools, with some documentation of how it was conducted, samples of student performance, and samples of feedback given to students. This, together with other forms of accountability and feedback, would ensure

that colleges had clear mechanisms for identifying problems in teaching or examination preparation, and the Department of Education would also have access to this information.

Line function reports require some sense of follow through

This is possibly something which the Department of Education could ask colleges to put into the rules and procedures. However, what would then also be crucial is that the Department provides responses or feedback to information sent by colleges. Umalusi would also be able to use this information in institutional audits; however, Umalusi would have to decide what levels of staff it would investigate in such processes, as this would have implications on time. It might only want to look at composite reports of Heads of Department, for example. Portfolios of evidence could still be required to be kept at all levels, however, down to the level of learners.

Support for and monitoring of moderators and verifiers through line functions

This notion of line functions would extend right up to Umalusi, including moderators and verifiers. This would also be building on existing practice, as in general colleges are very familiar with the procedures of moderation of examinations. This would enable appropriate support to be built at various levels.

Concerns were also raised about the appointing of moderators. Umalusi needs to consider whether stability is key, and moderators need to be maintained over a period, or whether they should have short-term periods. Short-term contracts might be necessary for security.

Roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined

There was a feeling of lack of clarity in the event of a dispute between an examiner and a moderator. Such relationships need to be clearly defined. In particular it appears as if disciplinary procedures for moderators are not clear. Umalusi is working on how to prevent irregularities occurring at a level of seniority.

Line function reports could be used to foster collegiality

In institutions where reporting procedures appear well established and known, there was a sense that such practices fostered collegiality, by providing the basis for ongoing and regular discussion. As well as records of information from lecturer level currently sent to rectors, information is shared on issues pertaining directly to new forms and requirements of assessment and quality assurance. There is in some colleges a sense of care, which is important in thinking about quality in education. It probably gets fostered from the top, but can be developed through actions that at least appear as ‘care’, such as carefully thought through procedures that are binding under good management. This could influence quality in an intangible way, and could be part of building a community of shared practice, as opposed to bureaucratic checks. This could imply that part of quality assurance might be the inculcation of attitudes of willingness and care. This is a tough call and one that would have to happen through the provider.

Reporting requirements must be kept simple

What emerged clearly from the research in terms of assessor training is that large numbers of trained assessors have struggled to get registered because of the difficulty of compiling suitable portfolios of evidence. It is important therefore that assessment processes and requirements are kept simple, and lecturers are required to keep minimum records of such practices. It is crucial that ways are found of minimizing additional paper work; such procedures must be built into day-to-day operations. Over time a more precise understanding could be developed of what kinds of information should be recorded and kept on record.

External assessment will be a crucial part of the system, and is where Umalusi must focus its attention in terms of moderation

External assessment is a crucial part of judging learner competence, because it allows for comparison across an uneven system, fosters standardization, where such standardization is deemed necessary, and is a means for institutional accountability. It is the key aspect of assessment which Umalusi should verify, amongst other reasons because it is practically possible to do so. External assessment does not only imply national assessment. Provinces could set external assessment tasks, or other large-scale assessment bodies might be set up. However, it would be impractical for Umalusi to deal with external assessment that does not exist on a large scale, and assess large parts of the system. The extent to which private providers, especially the large institutions, are included in this is something that must be considered.

In new qualifications, colleges are aiming at, 'ideal' assessment practices. While these attempts are laudatory, what emerged clearly is that such practices are only sustainable for very small numbers, and the 'ideal' cannot be taken to a mass scale.

For now, the main type of assessment in the colleges is the national examination, externally set and in written form. The logistics for the national examination are in place in the colleges. The national exam, while providing a means of comparison, and a focus for teaching, also constrains what and how teaching and assessment take place, such as practical work. Language is a particular consideration in South Africa.

Discussion about the role of national assessments for private providers could be discussed in conjunction with discussion about accreditation.

There should be some kind of external exam or nationally or provincially set assessment task for all programmes

Umalusi should consider discussing with the Department of Education, national or provincial, about moving towards appointing an examiner for each subject, each year, as well as a moderator. The department could instruct the examiner whether to set an exam or common assessment task or both. The Department, in conjunction with Umalusi, must also ensure the moderation of the paper or task, the moderation of the writing/performing,

and the moderation of evaluation or marking. Umalusi would then verify these processes. An interim model might include a role for an external moderator to act as a 'middleman' between the moderators and verifiers. The last would verify processes and 'endpoint' quality.

Colleges should be given better feedback of moderator and verifier opinions

It was felt that a breakdown of the paper by section, with comments on general responses would be useful for the lecturers. What it would involve for the Department of Education and Umalusi is some way of breaking down results by campus. An interpreted analysis could go to each head of department in a college. The interpreted nature of the analysis must be stressed, for ethical and co-operative reasons. In addition, some form of follow up on action statements made, through the provider, could be a possible requirement from Umalusi. This could perhaps have the form of head of department reports, collated through the rectors. If there are any anomalies or unique results, Umalusi could ask for an investigation by the provider of why there were discrepancies, as it might point to a problem with teaching.

Exam processes and procedures need to be clarified and clearly communicated to all involved

While some clear guidelines for examination procedures exist, Umalusi and the Department of Education could play a role in devising a statement for students and staff, simply outlining minimum processes and 'rights' in assessment, with lines of appeal should these be infringed. At the same time, this statement could include the responsibilities of learners and educators respectively in assessment, that hold them to fair and transparent assessment practices, without burdening the system for either.

The role for Umalusi to foster discussion across institutions on assessment concerns is stressed: discussion about competence and expected competence; about fitness for purpose, and clarity on purpose; about standardization; and about judgement and evidence. Such discussions can serve to provide support in the light of new prescriptions.

Some external assessment should be considered for skills workshops and practicals

Practicals, once part of the national examinations, are being re-introduced in the form of skills workshops. Some colleges are trying to get these going to compensate for the absence of practical training and assessment. The practical component of the current courses in engineering for example, is really only demonstrations of the theory, whereas the workshops are skill focussed. There is currently no standardization of these skills workshops, and lecturers all 'do their own thing' in the assessment of practicals. This problem partly relates to the discussion above about the role of general vocational education; it is probably, however, that some degree of practical training would still be part of such programmes. It is also felt that practicals are often neglected, because of their minor contribution in the formal assessment system. Most college staff interviewed strongly felt that external exams should include a stipulated practical component.

It should be possible for the Department of Education to prescribe assessment tasks in this regard, and to moderate them through random checks on sites. What emerged clearly from the research is that the practitioners in the area felt that trade specialists should be called on in this regard; this is compatible with the Departments' approach to setting of exams, where expert lecturers in particular fields are called upon. For example, there could be a request to colleges for a submission on one suggested common assessment task per year. The national examiner in that subject (either the person who is setting the exam, or in areas where there is no national exam, a senior lecturer appointed specifically as the common assessment task examiner in that subject) will receive submissions from each college (collaboratively designed where practically possible) and will chose one, and set it as the national common assessment task, refined if necessary. In addition, the compiled tasks could be sent back to all colleges, with comments. Common assessment tasks must include assessment criteria and assessment guidelines.

Provinces could appoint moderators to visit a random number of colleges. Moderators must submit a written analysis which must reach all relevant lecturers, pointing out problem areas and strengths in terms of assessment practices. Umalusi should look at the correlation between typical measures of the term marks and the exam marks. Those colleges with the biggest discrepancies between on-site assessment and external assessment should be identified for development.

The discussion above about building shared practice is also of relevance to workshop assessment; however, it seems that it is desirable that some degree of external assessment be developed.

Decisions about the relative weight of external assessment need to be taken and clearly communicated

Decisions about how much the national exams should 'count' vary; Umalusi and the Department of Education should consider the relationship between standardization, centralisation, what can be tested in a 'mass' way versus what can only be tested on site, and the importance of moving toward a shared sense of teacher judgement.

Clarity needs to be developed about what integrated assessment entails

This is particularly important in terms of the awarding of certificates. The extent to which it is required will depend on the extent to which qualifications are broken into discreet parts (or unit standards), the size of such parts, and the relationship between them. In the past, for example, the existence of subjects, which were examined separately, was seen as sufficient basis for awarding of a qualification. If, however, learners are being tested on long series of disaggregated skills, an integrated assessment might be necessary to bring these together.

The notion of exit level competences is important in this regard, as is the notion of 'fitness for purpose', which of course relates back to the discussion above of the role of general vocational education.

Consideration needs to be given to how results are published

Many colleges expressed concern about the fact that they are held accountable by examination marks. One of the problems in this regard is that in general colleges say they are obliged by departmental policy to let any learner write exams, even if they have not attended class at all and have no year mark. These learners, referred to as 'street entries', tend to bring down their pass marks. This policy is regarded as unfair, as the performance of these learners is not reflective of the teaching of the college. Another issue related to the publishing of results is that colleges have different learner bases; some institutions felt that they took in learners who came from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, for example. There was also some tension about different campuses within the newly merged colleges, where some were seen as obtaining better results than others, but the published results were aggregated. Umalusi could raise these concerns with the Department of Education.

A breakdown of the results by campus could be useful for Umalusi, the provider and the colleges. This breakdown would give the campus scores in relation to the measures of central tendency, the mean, median and mode, of all colleges, and the upper limit of the range, to provide indicators of both typical and 'best' results. Allowance would have to be made for interpretation of the results, within campus contexts. These campus or college specific results would not be distributed to other campuses, nor should they be used in any way as league tables, but would be used developmentally by the colleges, the provider and the quality assuror. What this would involve for Umalusi together with the provider is some way of breaking down results by campus, and if feasible, by question. In addition, some form of follow up on action statements made, through the provider, could be a possible requirement from Umalusi, though such management accountability would require review once quality assurance practices are more established in the colleges. In the long term, it is not likely to be sustainable, or desired, for Umalusi.

Private providers should be able to train learners for external assessment provided by the Department of Education

Private vocational education institutions have in the past managed assessment themselves, and have issued their own certificates. Historically, information on the quality assurance arrangements for these qualifications has been difficult to obtain.

Of course a major issue with regard to private providers will be institutional accreditation, which is not the focus of this report, although it is obviously linked to the quality assurance of assessment. Umalusi will have difficult decisions in terms of deciding which institutions it will be able to deal with, as there are many small providers in the area. It seems advisable to wait for the investigation currently being conducted by the HSRC, from which Umalusi will be able to gain an understanding of the field in terms of how many providers there are, and what main categories they fall into. This should not preclude Umalusi from including private providers in decisions that it is taking at a systemic level. For example, if there is a national examination system for specific fields and for specific qualifications, private institutions should be able to register learners for the same examinations that learners in public institutions write. As

such, they would obviously also have to meet the accreditation requirements of Umalusi, which this report does not deal with, but which is dealt with through Umalusi's provider accreditation policy. Their learners would then be able to obtain certificates from Umalusi.

For other private providers, the issue is more complicated. There is a vast number of courses on offer, many of which could not possibly fit within the DoE's list of qualifications. It is possible that they could simply be required to be registered by the DoE, and allowed to issue their own certificates. However, there is the potential for abuse of learners in such a system. While it will be difficult for Umalusi to deal with the vast numbers of providers, possibly it should take decisions about dealing with large ones, even if they are issuing their own certificates. It could require them to meet certain basic minimums. It seems advisable that it deals with these institutions through provider accreditation processes, and only quality assures assessment if it is taking place on a large scale. Where institutions operate on a national basis with satellite campuses, Umalusi could adopt a similar approach to that adopted in the public sector, focusing on the central processes and procedures, as opposed to each individual site. Some large private colleges have systems of moderation in place.

Umalusi should also be recommending or initiating discussion with SETAs as well as the DoE and DoL about the establishment of national assessment boards, or increasing the capacity of existing ones. For example, it is possible that the DoE could increase its capacity, and undertake to appoint national examiners in more subjects. On the other hand, the DoL could increase the capacity of Indlela to conduct testing in occupationally specific skills areas. However, Umalusi should make it clear that it will not be able to issue certificates without some kind of national testing. This does not mean that learning sites cannot issue their own qualifications, or that SETAs cannot issue their own qualifications on the basis of internal testing only, although Umalusi might think it is not advisable.

In addition, all guidelines and exemplars for assessment could be shared with private providers who wish their learners to obtain national certificates.

Building communities of practice is also an important part of the standardization of assessment

Standardization is a theme that runs through many interviews, including the view that first standardization is needed and then permission to diverge a bit, that freedom is desired but within parameters. This speaks to the approach we have taken, that first minimum standards must be in place, and guidelines for good practice given. Minimum standards need not be onerous, and should aim to minimise technical abuse through meeting the letter rather than the spirit of the law. Through communication, this can be continually emphasised. This is a possible approach for Umalusi to take. It could consider for example setting a margin for error, to allow for minor differences in judgement and at the same time, fostering discussion where discrepancies arise.

The call for some standardization of quality guidelines could be addressed by the identification and prioritising of key areas for development, using guides to good practice, which Umalusi could develop (for example, the draft Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) Guides to Good Practice).

Umalusi should encourage the building of communities of practice

Notions of standardization and competence are complex. It is clear that views of what constitutes competence vary.

On the other hand, implicit in much of what college staff said was a sense that there is such a thing as an 'absolute' standard; one that can be reflected accurately through assessment. This is related to the understanding of unit standards as somehow embodying all that judgements would need to be made about; the process of assessment is then the simple task of applying the instruments that are contained in the unit standard outcomes. Some college staff asserted, for example, that standards would tell them whether or not exams were necessary. In order for improved practice in this sector, it is vital Umalusi encourages continuous debate about judgement which is implicit and necessary in assessment, about the relative nature of standards, and the role of inter-subjective agreement on what constitutes a standard.

How one comes to agreement or at least partial agreement about what is competence, how it can be judged on the basis of performances, and how to judge it across contexts will depend on working together across institutions, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Umalusi's role in this then becomes one of getting institutions to speak to one another about expected levels of competence, and what constitutes sufficient evidence for this.

What is clear is that lecturers need to work together, and forums and discussions need to be built into their work in various ways, as, regardless of the external assessment system, shared practice is a crucial part of standardization.

On-going professional development of educators is required, which should include on-going development of assessment capacity

The assessor training experience has been a mixed one. A large number of college lecturers have been sent on (often expensive) assessor training; few have been declared competent. Generally there is a positive attitude towards such training; this could be for a range of reasons, but does seem to include an increased reflection on assessment, a willingness to share ideas with colleagues, and an injection of energy into institutions. However, there is a strong feeling that assessment cannot be generic, and that more subject specific training is required. In addition, competence was seen to be increasingly dependent on the idea of training.

At times the assessor training has created confusion with regard to quality assurance, as there is a sense that in some way this training will ensure standardization. While this is

clearly not the case, it appears that the push to assessor training has highlighted a need for consideration of assessment issues, and the role that on-going professional development can play in building a sense of common practice, thus contributing to standardization. Assessor training is seen by college staff as hard work, but interesting, providing an opportunity to work with colleagues. The opportunity to reflect on practice was seen by many as very valuable. Thus, while the requirement for registration of assessors is likely to fall away, and while short courses of this nature are not able to conclusively 'develop competence', they can play a valuable role in building a sense of common approaches, and gradually improving quality. Such training could include assessment regarded as 'old style', such as setting and marking examinations, as this is likely to still be widely in use in the foreseeable future.

Accountability for decisions taken can foster a sense of shared practice

As discussed above, ensuring that line functions with regard to reporting about assessment are followed can contribute to developing a sense of accountability for decisions taken, and can assist in ensuring that there are appropriate support mechanisms in the system.

The admission by one lecturer that students were informed about their rights of appeal as well as the procedures in this regard because this was necessary for his assessor training provides some support for this assertion.

Internal assessment should be supported and systematized

Internal assessment is crucial to provide feedback for the learner, to contribute to judging the learners' competence, and to ensure that the learner is not judged on one performance only. In addition internal assessment guides the educator in teaching, and provides a measure of accountability for both learner and educators. It is impractical to attempt to verify internal assessment, as different procedures would be in place in each institution. However, institutions should have moderation processes in place where appropriate. Support put in place for internal assessment could assist both with site-based assessment which contributes to the final mark and assessment conducted purely for formative purposes.

Guidelines and instruments for internal assessment should be developed and shared within the sector

There are three different kinds of site-based or internal assessment—the site-based component of national courses ('term marks' which are included in summative assessment); the site-based assessment of practicals; and the site-based assessment of occupationally specific qualifications. Some kind of benchmarking would be useful, and could be necessary to ensure some degree of equivalence both between the vocational and occupationally specific programmes, and between the same qualifications offered by different colleges. There is a clear sense that some kinds of guidelines or instruments for internal or formative assessment would contain the insecurity which is felt by lecturers.

In all three of these situations, Umalusi could consider suggesting that the provinces develop some kind of common assessment task or exemplars of possible assessment tasks; or conduct moderation of a sample of assessments. Alternatively, or in addition, such instruments could be developed at a college level and shared with other colleges.

Provinces could make such tools available to private providers as well, and Umalusi could use them to monitor assessment practices in them. Umalusi could encourage the Department of Education to set up such systems and facilitate such processes. This could include a consideration of having a common assessment task for say 10% of the site-based assessment that is marked within the college

Assessment instruments and approaches need to be developed which are sustainable and practical in terms of numbers and time

It appears that many of the assessment practices associated with the new qualifications involved the development of detailed assessment instruments. These are motivated by a desire for good assessment practice, but are often very time consuming. Role-plays and interviews with learners, for example, take about half an hour per learner. In addition, the procedures and requirements for recording such assessments are seen as time consuming, bureaucratic at times, and unsustainable except for very small learner numbers. While such decisions will rest with the provider, Umalusi could encourage providers to modify practices where appropriate. In addition, if such assessment practices were adopted for the external assessment component, it would be clear that Umalusi would have difficulty in moderating them.

Information should be more clearly available to colleges in terms of the use of internal assessment marks

There is some lack of clarity in terms of how the term mark counts towards the final mark in various subjects. In the interests of transparency, clear information should be made available in this regard. In addition, knowledge about the circumstances under which internal marks will be disregarded could be an incentive for better practice.

Transparency and policy confusion

The respondents indicated a willingness and intention to align practices with new policies. However, there is confusion and insecurity in the system in terms of what will be allowed, when policy will change, which structures colleges should be dealing with, et cetera. Rumours abound, and while there is innovative practice, there is also nervousness and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the different technical requirements of the different bodies.

Umalusi needs to encourage the flow of information

Much of this problem stems from the Department of Education, and while it is not always related to assessment, there is clearly a sense of confusion and lack of clear information and guidelines in the sector, which can contribute to a high degree of demoralization. College staff do seem to feel cut off from information about assessment; for example, there was some confusion about the compilation of the final mark, and how the year mark

was weighted across various subjects in this regard. Umalusi could consider playing a role in communicating with colleges regularly about assessment concerns, deriving from the line function reports discussed above. This could entail direct communication with teaching staff, by email for example, or it could entail workshops or regular 'newsletters'. On the other hand, Umalusi could encourage the Department of Education to conduct such communication. Umalusi and the Department jointly could assist in the development of a system something like the IEB's 'User Group' system, where subject heads across institutions get together to hold discussions on matters relating to their area of specialization, and the assessment thereof. Such groups could also communicate with all colleges. In some cases, moderators did report back to examiners, but not to all those teaching the students.

Umalusi should engage proactively in the resolution of key policy areas

It is clear that the policy environment is unstable and volatile. The key issue of the certification of the FETC is still unresolved. Various key issues which influence the policies and procedures which Umalusi will need to develop are unresolved, such as the certification and curriculum framework for the general vocational FETC. The amount of moderation, for example, which will be required for qualifications without national assessment strategies, is likely to be greater, and probably unsustainable. In addition, external moderation might become necessary, if only internal assessment is used. While this report favours Umalusi playing a role in the moderation of externally designed assessments, this is an issue which will need to be clarified amongst all the role players.

Umalusi needs to work with the Department of Education and the SETAs to ensure that decisions are taken about external examination, and communicates these decisions to providers

There appears to particularly be lack of clarity in location of national assessment. SETAs seem to be attempting to address this problem in various ways, compiling exemplars, in some cases, and considering prescribing assessment tasks in others. While this is an inappropriate role for an ETQA to play, it seems clear that SETAs are stepping in to fill what is clearly a gap in the policy. The conceptualisation of the NQF is based on the idea of registered qualifications, offered by accredited providers, assessed by registered assessors, moderated internally, and verified by ETQAs. However, what is becoming increasingly apparent is that the accreditation of providers and registration of assessors is not a sufficient basis for standardization in national qualifications; in addition, the assessment unit standard, and therefore the training that is undergone before becoming registered, is not focused on designing assessment tasks.

Colleges need to get clear messages about Umalusi's relationships with other ETQAs and the Department of Education.

Umalusi's relationship with SETA ETQAs is of particular concern to colleges, who feel paralysed in many instances. Added to this is perceived differences between Umalusi and the Department of Education. Colleges feel that they are caught in the middle of various high level disagreements, and that they and their learners are being sacrificed. In addition, there is a feeling that there are conflicting processes and requirements in terms of quality assurance done by the SETAs and Umalusi. Whether or not this is the case, and whether

or not the new recommendations of the NQF Consultative Report will resolve some of the real problems, it is important that colleges should be given clear information. It is also important that consideration is given by all role players (Umalusi, SETAs, and the Department of Education) to what happens to learners currently in the system, as the result of such disagreements.

This issue is of particular concern to colleges because of their view that learners need to be employable, and their assumption that industry wants specific skills which are embodied in the new qualifications. While this relates to the discussion above on the role of general vocational qualifications, it points to a debate that needs to take place within the college sector. Umalusi might encourage the Department of Education to be flexible to enable colleges to respond to specific requests, which could contribute to their financial viability. Respondents from colleges urged Umalusi to put pressure on the Department in this regard.

There is also a need to clarify private providers about the processes and requirements, particularly in relation to the DoE's registration processes.

Other issues for consideration

- There is a call from some colleges for standardization at entry level. Perhaps tests should be available on request where school reports are not adequate.
- Umalusi and the Department of Education should investigate the possibilities of international benchmarking for standardization. As we point out in the brief section below on international approaches, one of the problems in this regard is the fact that vocational education is organized very differently in different countries. The Department, however, when defining learning programmes, could investigate where there are appropriate international comparisons; it was felt by many in the college sector that there needs to be some mechanisms developed for keeping abreast of international trends.
- The current practice of appointed examiners writing textbooks, which are then prescribed by colleges, needs to be considered. It is difficult, however, to see what can be done about this, and whether it should be regarded as an acceptable practice, albeit morally questionable.
- Concern was expressed that assessment seems to increasingly be seen as more important than teaching and learning. Quality assurance of assessment, and assessment itself, should not take over.

3. RESEARCH APPROACHES

APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Policy needs to be grounded in a deep understanding of the realities of practice if it is to be effective. This project aimed firstly to describe and analyse existing assessment practices in the TVET sector as a basis for the development of appropriate and effective policies and procedures for the quality assurance of assessment. In addition, Umalusi is constrained by its resources; approaches to quality assurance were therefore explored that are not overly demanding on the current resource capacity of Umalusi, notwithstanding different ideals within the broader quality assurance discourse.

What is 'Quality Assurance of Assessment'?

Defining quality assurance

Quality *assurance* is often distinguished from quality *control*. Quality control can be what takes place when a mechanism or process to evaluate quality is used at *the end* of a process through which a product or service is delivered. Quality assurance, on the other hand, is generally described as taking place when mechanisms or processes to evaluate quality are used *throughout* the process through which a product or service is delivered. This enables organizations to ensure that problems are identified and addressed when they happen, or before they happen. Within this approach, quality control is seen as measuring quality after the fact, while quality assurance is seen as promoting quality. Quality control is often seen as regulatory and judgmental, while quality assurance is seen as supportive and enabling.

Umalusi has as its mission to promote and assure quality in general and further education and training in South Africa, through providing reliable, responsive and reputable services in a supportive and reflective manner. In the first few years of implementation Umalusi would like to focus on providing support to providers, in which it promotes quality of educational provision.

Quality assurance of assessment

Many Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) currently focus their activities on exit level assessments only. As defined by the Education, Training, and Development Practices Quality Assurance body (ETDQA):

> …(q)uality assurance of learner achievement means checking whether learners have actually met the outcomes in the standards and qualifications that they (and their providers) claim to have achieved…. A quality assurance function therefore checks that summative assessment results submitted to it for the award of SAQA [South

> African Qualifications' Authority] registered credits are valid, fair and reliable, and it reflects the appropriate level for the award of credits…

While quality assurance of learner achievement is of course the major focus in the quality assurance of assessment, there are limitations to the way it has been understood and conducted. Some people feel that past practices have focused on quality *control*, and have not always been used as a mechanism to improve quality throughout the process. The problems being experienced with regard to current admission practices may also not be resolved by an exclusive focus on the quality assurance of learner achievement.

For these reasons, Umalusi's approach to quality assurance of assessment could move beyond an exclusive focus on the quality assurance of learner achievement, if it has the capacity to do so.

The understanding of quality assurance which informs this research

Quality assurance and evidence

The processes of both assessment and quality assurance are similar to research processes. They are processes which involve asking questions about learning, finding ways to best answer the questions, getting empirical data, interpreting evidence, and communicating the findings to others. Assessment attempts to say what learning has taken place, and how well, while quality assurance of assessment aims to document the adequacy of the assessment measures. Both require some sense of sampling, and of professional interpretation of the findings.

Quality assurance and trust

The relationship between trust and regulation is useful to consider in relation to quality assurance. The more people depend on rules to regulate their interactions, the less they may trust each other and vice versa. With too many rules in place, initiative, creativity, innovativeness, and judgement are devalued in favour of obedience. With too few rules, learners may suffer at the hands of the careless. Too many detailed rules could signify a lack of trust in the role players' abilities to function well and hold responsibilities; too few rules could carry the message that practices are individual. Too few rules could also fail in the provision of guidelines and minimum expectations for good practice. On one hand, educators could work to rule and refuse any form of self-reflection on assessment; and on the other, ad hoc or inconsistent practices of assessment could abound.

Giving responsibility for quality to all in the system, and of searching for problems at source requires a shift from a system of looking at throughputs to looking at the processes of assessment and teaching themselves. Sorting out problems where they occur will require thoughtful intervention, and that this will involve considerable problems initially. Working with the educators and trainers and asking them to develop ways of assessing more validly, reliably, transparently, and fairly, rather than increasing legislation, regulation, and rules, could be a way to proceed. These views were held in mind during the research process, including the concern that some legislation should exist to indicate minimum expectations of assessment practice to protect learners but that the establishment of long term relationships of trust with the quality assuring bodies,

assessors, and providers would be desirable. Bearing these considerations in mind, in this research we attempt to work with the tension between rules and trust, and between the ideal and our current understanding of the 'real', informed through the research.

Minimum standards or developmental approach to good practice?
Umalusi is a new body. Although it inherits a legacy of quality assurance of exit level examinations in schooling, the quality assurance of programmes and assessment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is relatively new. In order to be able to make a meaningful impact within its budgetary limitations, Umalusi needs to aim for a manageable amount of work, phased in gradually.

In order for quality assurance to be workable, and not to become a financial drain on the system and time consuming for providers, quality assurance should be targeted at minimum standards as well as criteria for good practice. It is important to have descriptors for good practice in order to set goals for continuous quality improvement. But the difficulty with having good practice guides only is that they can tend to be overwhelming—the standards can be too demanding given contextual constraints, and so there may be a tendency either to ignore them or to pay lip service to them. In these cases, bad practice which can be improved might well escape attention. While improving quality is a vital part of Umalusi's work, protecting the South African public from bad practice should be the immediate focus.

This is of course, a somewhat contentious position, and an issue much debated in literature on quality assurance. There is a tension between a developmental approach which focuses on supporting and improving quality, and an approach which focuses on preventing bad practice, by identifying, intervening, or closing/un-licensing institutions which cannot meet certain minimum standards. However, given that the explicit call for quality assurance is new in South African TVET programmes, and given the limited infrastructure of Umalusi currently, it is suggested that Umalusi should start by identifying particular areas of bad practice in the current context, and develop minimum standards to control these. It should follow with the development of criteria for good practice, and attempt to popularise them in the sector.

Learner focus
Umalusi's focus is on the quality of learning that happens in the TVET institutions. In this research we intend to keep learning our primary focus, but in doing so need to look at the relationships between educational role players throughout the system that impact on the learner, and also the relationships between role players and what is made tangible about assessment, such as policy documents and reports.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research attempted to gain an overview of the approaches to assessment within TVET institutions, in order to gain insight into the current functioning of quality control

and quality assurance mechanisms. Three main research activities took place: an analysis of current policy, a questionnaire which was sent to all public FET colleges as well as a number of private providers, and case studies which were conducted in selected colleges and campuses, including one private provider. Detailed explanations of the research approaches which informed the case studies and questionnaire can be found in sections 5,6, 7, and 8 respectively, and the research protocols and questionnaire are in Appendices A and B respectively. The questionnaire sent to the public institutions was slightly amended before it was sent to the private institutions. The findings are discussed separately for the private and public sectors.

The researchers met twice with a Reference Group of experts in the field, appointed by Umalusi.

4. ANALYSIS OF POLICY BACKGROUND

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS, AND POLICY

Broader national policy and legislative context for FET

It could be argued that specific policies around the quality assurance of assessment are clear, and that these must simply be implemented; the broader questions are irrelevant. However, there is a range of factors in the broader policy environment which will impinge on the quality assurance of assessment in various ways. Quality assurance policies and procedures have to be conceptualised jointly with policies about provision and the relationships between centralization and the needs for external quality assurance and benchmarking. As the NQF Consultative Document notes, there has been, from the outset of the NQF, extreme uncertainty over jurisdictional boundaries and rule of engagement (Departments of Education and Labour, 2003). It is clearly vital that such uncertainty is resolved, before long term policies for the quality assurance of assessment are developed. What particularly needs to be noted here is the fluidity and lack of clarity of the policy environment, particularly given the recently released NQF Consultative Document, the Departments of Education and Labour's responses to the recommendations of the NQF Review.

The policy environment has for some time been characterised by lack of clarity about power relations between the various role players in the system, lack of clarity over areas of jurisdiction, and apparent contradictions between legislation, notably, the National Education Policy Act and the SAQA Act, particularly in terms of who can develop policy.[2] As the Study Team which reviewed the NQF noted, some provisions of the legislative framework are ambiguous, some overlap, some are inconsistent with others, and some have been overtaken by events (Departments of Education and Labour 2002).

It seems sensible in such an environment to proceed with caution and care in the development and implementation of policies and procedures, while at the same time considering the needs of learners that are currently in the system. It is of no value to take decisions which will have long term policy implications on expedient grounds; on the other hand, it is a problem if learners are not able to obtain certificates or if the value of their certificates is questioned because of lack of resolution among key role players.

[2] See Umalusi discussion document *The organization of qualifications in the FET band: current thinking and possibilities*.

While the report has now been issued, and as such is a step towards resolving some of the problems in the system, there is still going to be a consultative process on the recommendations, and legislative change is likely. The recommendations of the report will change the nature and function of Umalusi somewhat, giving it the additional responsibility for standards setting, and dividing it into two chambers, one for general, and one for general vocational education. In engaging with the recommendations of the report, Umalusi will have to consider what policies it should be developing in the meantime, and how it should be proceeding. Some of the key changes relevant to the quality assurance of assessment in technical and vocational education are summarized below.

Key changes suggested by the NQF Consultative Document

- There should be three clearly developed pathways within the NQF—general; general vocational; and trade, occupational and professional. While there should be possibilities for articulation between them, the logic of the three pathways is different, and will involve different approaches and processes at times. However, the document notes that the general vocational pathway will be difficult to conceptualise and define.
- The distinction between unit standards-based qualifications and whole qualifications should fall away; the new single basis for the development of qualifications would be that all qualifications are made up of component parts, and all qualifications must be designed to produce an integrative and cumulative effect.
- NSBs should be disbanded, and as well as SGBs in their current form.
- Three overarching Quality Councils (QC's) should be created: a Trade, Occupational and Professional Quality Assurance Council; a General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Council; and a Higher Education and Training Quality Assurance Council. These councils would have the responsibility for coordinating the design of qualifications and generation of standards within their area of competence, as well as recommending qualifications for registration on the NQF; and coordinating the quality assurance of qualifications within their area of competence. One of the aims of the establishment of the three QCs would be to reduce the number of bodies in the system.
- Assessors would no longer need to be registered on the basis of the assessment unit standards, unless they are assessing in the workplace.
- Qualifications cannot be worth fewer than 120 credits. (This has implications for the Nated qualifications, as many of them are smaller than this.)

Specific policy issues (relevant legislation, regulations, policy, and procedures from Umalusi, SAQA, and SETA ETQAs, relating to quality assurance of TVET assessment)

Designing qualifications and learning programmes

While there is a general idea within the education and training system that there will be one FETC offered for all learning outcomes at NQF level 4, there are as yet no regulations for this qualification, and it is not clear what it will entail.

One of the key problems in the system has been some degree of confusion in terms of whose area of jurisdiction it is to develop qualifications. Any policy for the quality assurance of assessment will have to be based on the systemic policies for assessment, which in turn must be linked to policies for qualifications and programmes. The Department of Education has signalled its perspective by developing the curriculum framework, and hence the qualification, for the FETC in schooling, through its own processes, and not those of SAQA. As the NQF Consultative Document notes, the NSB processes seem to have effectively been abandoned, except in so far as they relate to the workplace learning community (Departments of Education and Labour 2003).

What is not yet clear is the process of developing qualifications for the FET colleges. Will they simply offer the unit standards based qualifications, or will some qualifications still be developed by the department, in a similar process to the old NATED list? In other words, there is still no clarity about the vocational and occupationally specific FETCs as qualifications, nor is their clarity about the extent to which there will be centrally determined programmes, or syllabi, within the college system. The recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document suggest that the general vocational pathway will be the basic curriculum of FET colleges at levels 2 – 4. As such, according to this document, the responsibility for designing qualifications will rest with the newly created Quality Council in General and Further Education. What is not clear from this recommendation is where the responsibility for programme design will be; in other words, will it be prescribed by the Department of Education for FET colleges, or will individual colleges be able to design their own programmes based on the qualifications.

Current ETQA regulations prescribing the functions and requirements of all ETQAs

The current ETQA regulations under the South African Qualifications Authority Act 1995 (Act No 58 of 1995)—both of which are likely to be changed under the recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document—detail the functions of Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies. Functions specific to assessment are that ETQAs are required to:

- evaluate assessment
- facilitate moderation
- register assessors
- cooperate with moderator bodies (which, as we understand it, have not yet been created).

The broad functions of ETQAs relate to assessment in various ways, because, for example, accrediting providers requires attention to assessment policies and procedures; promoting quality includes the quality of assessment, as well as quality promotion of provision through assessment; monitoring provision includes moderating assessment, and maintaining a data base includes assessment results. This report, however, does not deal with broader quality assurance issues, such as accreditation and programme approval, although assessment is obviously part of both of them.

The GENFEDQA Act—a different emphasis for Umalusi's work

However, while Umalusi is an ETQA, it is also governed by its own act. The *General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act*, No. 58 of 2001, establishes the GENFETQA, now known as Umalusi, which quality-assures qualifications registered on the NQF. The *GENFETQA Act* defines Umalusi's powers and functions: to provide for quality assurance in general and further education and training; amongst others, to provide for control over the norms and standards of curriculum and assessment; to provide for the issue of certificates at the exit points; and to provide for the conduct of assessment. The Act defines Umalusi as the quality-assurance body for all institutions that have been established, declared or registered under the *South African Schools Act*, the *Further Education and Training Act* or the *Adult Basic Education and Training Act*.

It must be noted that the Act might be considerably altered as a result of the recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document, but this document maintains the position that the state as a provider does not have to be accredited.

The *GENFETQA Act*, although it deems Umalusi to be the band ETQA for the GET and FET bands, and although it refers to the definition of an ETQA in the SAQA Act, differs in a significant respect. Umalusi is not responsible for programme accreditation, except with respect to private providers. The major function of all other ETQAs and, indeed, of *any* ETQA (according to SAQA Regulations) is to accredit providers to offer specific programmes. Again, this might change following the recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document, which suggests that there should be a general de-emphasis on programme accreditation.

However, the most fundamental difference between the ETQA regulations and the *GENFETQA Act*, which probably lies in the spirit, more than the letter, of these documents, is unlikely to be changed by the new recommendations. The ETQA regulations implicitly assume a model whereby providers are conducting their own assessment, which is internally moderated, and then externally moderated (or verified) by an ETQA; this also implies that the certificate is issued by the ETQA. This thinking is captured in a variety of SAQA documents, such as *Certification of Learners by Accredited Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies*; and *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications*. The *GENFETQA Act*, on the other hand, assumes a model of internal as well as external assessment. With regard to internal assessment, this act gives Umalusi the power to issue

directives for internal assessment, which assessment bodies must monitor. With regard to external assessment, the Act lays down the functions of a provider or assessment body, in such things as combating irregularities, ensuring that assessment is on the prescribed subject matter, ensuring that assessment is moderated by an internal moderator appointed by the assessment body, submitting assessment material to an external moderator for confirmation that it conforms to the required standards, et cetera. This section of the act generally describes the kinds of functions which are undertaken by the Department of Education and Umalusi with respect to the senior certificate, and, to a more limited extent, some of the N qualifications. In other words, while the provinces are 'deemed' to be accredited providers, they are also, in a sense, responsible for external assessment. There is not necessarily a problem with this. Realistically, in practice, it is workable. The provinces have to be held responsible for provision, as discussed above. However, there is an important difference between them and their 'learning sites', the schools and technical colleges. This makes it feasible to talk about schools as conducting internal assessment, and provincial and national exams functioning as external assessment, although technically, this assessment is still in fact internal, as it is conducted by the (deemed to be) accredited provider.

The problem arises with the rest of the system. The problem is that this situation is not in any way analogous to private providers, even fairly substantial ones, conducting their own assessment. The public system seems to have been designed on the notion that in order for national comparability and standardization to be obtained, what is sufficient is nationally registered standards and qualifications; registered assessors who assess against the standards (internally); internal moderation by registered internal moderators; external moderation (or verification) by ETQAs; and certification by ETQAs. However, what is becoming increasingly apparent is that the accreditation of providers and registration of assessors is not a sufficient basis for standardization in national qualifications; in addition, the assessment unit standard, and therefore the training that is undergone before becoming registered, is not focused on designing assessment tasks, but rather simply on conducting assessment. SETAs seem to be attempting to address this problem in various ways, compiling exemplars, in some cases, and considering prescribing assessment tasks in others. While this is an inappropriate role for an ETQA to play, it seems clear that SETAs are stepping in to fill what is a gap in the policy.

These issues have a major impact on the kinds of work that Umalusi will have to do in its verification. The amount of moderation, for example, which will be required for qualifications without national assessment strategies, is far greater, and is unlikely to be sustainable.

The regulation and organization of assessment

Thus, the organisation of assessment has enormous bearing on how the quality assurance of assessment is conceptualised. The central concern here, which needs resolution in order for policies on quality assurance to be finalized, is the extent to which there will be external assessment in the system, the amount of the final 'mark' such external assessment will count for, and where the setting and marking of such external assessment

will be done. Will the National Department continue to prescribe syllabi and set exams for certain qualifications which it then also funds? Will it prescribe syllabi and set exams for some of the new unit standards-based qualifications? These and other questions will need to be answered, before Umalusi can take clear policy decisions, as the moderation of one national exam against a prescribed syllabus is clearly an entirely different process to the moderation of individual assessment processes at each individual site against individually designed learning programmes. Of course a quality assurance body can engage proactively in the resolution of such problems, and can indicate its requirements in terms of the issuing of certificates. In terms of logistical capacity, Umalusi is unlikely to be able to conduct moderation of assessment if it is all internal and conducted only against unit standards, with no common syllabus. However, even if it were logistically feasible, Umalusi and the Department of Education might also not see such extensive moderation as the optimal use of resources in the national system.

Whether or not the new recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document are adopted, one of the key conceptual problems with regard to the certification of the FETC is where the examining/assessment of new qualifications lies; who designs and conducts assessment, and to what extent it is external to providers and standardised. Related to this is who designs syllabi and learning programmes. What also need to be clarified in the public sector are the roles and responsibilities of sites of provision (colleges) in relation to the provider, the Department of Education. In the private sector, these questions will relate to whether or not private institutions want Umalusi to issue them with certificates, and the extent to which Umalusi wants to and thinks it can protect learners from unethical providers.

In the past, for vocational and occupationally specific qualifications exams were set by the national Department of Education, and trade testing was done by the Centre for Trade Testing of the Minister of Labour. If diverse providers, both public and private, are going to offer the same qualification, there needs to be some kind of standardized national assessment requirement. If FET colleges are going to offer the 'new qualifications'—unit standards based qualifications, registered on the NQF, there needs to be some kind of external assessment body, which assesses learners. This does not mean that there should be no internal assessment, but that the final mark needs to be based on a combination of an internal and external mark. Even if the Department of Education is going to continue in the Nated paradigm, there needs to be clarity in terms of how much stipulation will be given about programmes and syllabi, and the extent and form of external assessment.

One possibility here is for the Department of Education to take on an increasingly great role in appointing national examiners for new qualifications. Such examiners could set exams where appropriate, or prescribe standardized assessment tasks (with prescribed procedures), for specific qualifications. Another possibility is for the establishment of new national boards for assessment of specific subject areas (like the old trade testing system). However, what does not appear to be viable is the external moderation, or

verification, of a myriad of totally separate assessment processes, against the same standards and qualifications.

Occupationally specific programmes in general vocational institutions

One of the issues which is also unresolved is the quality assurance of occupationally specific programmes offered by colleges. The general perception in SETAs is that Umalusi must give permission or go-ahead to the SETA to quality assure these programmes. However, Umalusi in a memorandum recently issued states that colleges must work with provinces in this regard, and provinces must approach SETAs to quality assure specific programmes, if they have approved that a college should offer such a qualification. If the new recommendations are adopted, provinces will then go directly to the TOP QC. This means trade, occupational, and professional qualifications would have nothing to do with Umalusi; the province would have to give the college permission to offer the qualification, and the TOP QC, probably through the relevant SETA, would monitor the quality and issue the certificate. However, there is likely to be difficulty in relation to the FETC, as it is likely that Umalusi will be delegated to issue all FETCs. It is not clear whether it will do this on the basis of a SETA quality assurance process, and whether, if this is the case, there will need to be stipulations about the organization of assessment and quality assurance.

The quality assurance of the fundamentals

However, there would still be concern about who 'quality assures' the fundamental component of the trade, occupational, and professional qualifications. Umalusi currently does not see quality assurance of the fundamentals as its concern. It argues that there are a variety of possible permutations in terms of how the fundamentals should relate to qualifications: there could be universal fundamental units running through each level and taken by all learners; there could be specifically designed fundamental unit standards for each of the three main learning pathways; there could be fundamentals common to each institution type; or there could be fundamentals common to a cluster of qualifications.

Umalusi also questions who will issue which qualifications, on what basis, and whether integrated assessments will take place that include the fundamental unit standards. While many people have argued that quality assuring the fundamentals is part of Umalusi's primary focus, Umalusi argues that fundamentals should not be taken out of the context of a qualification, and as such should be quality assured by the ETQA under which the qualification as a whole falls. Related to this, Umalusi argues that it will currently focus on quality assuring whole qualifications at levels one and four, as opposed to qualifications at levels two and three, and as opposed to parts of qualifications.

The general argument that has been raised by other organisations such as SETAs as to why Umalusi should quality assure the fundamentals is that they lie within Umalusi's 'primary focus'. The ETQA Regulations (Regulations 1127, 8 September 1998) define primary focus as 'that activity or objective within the sector upon which an organization or body concentrates its efforts'. Umalusi argues that its primary focus is the quality

assurance of general academic and general vocational qualifications in the FET and GET bands; it does not understand this as implying that it should assure all fundamentals.

Umalusi argued that it might be more appropriate for SETA ETQAs to quality assure and issue whole qualifications in their sectors, including the quality assurance of the fundamentals, as this would ensure that the fundamentals are appropriate for the needs of the sector and the specific qualification. The NQF Consultative Document seems to support this, as it argues that the fundamentals within the Trade, Occupational, and Professional pathway should be different to the fundamentals in general vocational and academic qualifications, and should be closely related to the needs of the qualification. This relates to ABET fundamentals which Umalusi currently quality assures; currently these are quality assured in relation to a GETC, and not a Trade, Occupational, or Professional qualification.

However, notwithstanding Umalusi's positions, there is still a clamour for the quality assurance of assessment of fundamentals to be done by Umalusi, and it is likely to be a source of contestation for some time to come. The recommendations of the NQF Consultative Document have an emphasis on whole qualifications, which might to some extent clear up the problems in this area. However, the issue for contention will be the extent to which learners can obtain individual credits, and the extent to which these will be certificated. This would be particularly of concern to adult learners.

One solution to this is to ensure that there are systemic assessments of packages of credits, grouped as 'subjects'. This is how it currently words in ABET; learners are able to obtain credits for individual subjects, through ABET examinations at level one, and through the current schooling examinations at level four. The credit for these subjects is quality assured by Umalusi, as learners are taking part in a systemic assessment which is in general organised for people who are trying to obtain a whole qualification. There is a significant difference, however, between this and a system whereby providers award learners credit against unit standards. Firstly, the unit standards are clustered into a 'subject'; learners do not obtain credits for individual standards. Secondly, learners are currently writing nationally set exams.

It is generally seen as undesirable for all learners to have to study languages which are based on school syllabi, including, for example, large components of literature. But this does not mean that there is no possibility of some kind of externally set syllabus for language in general vocational qualifications, and correspondingly, an externally set exam or assessment task. A possible recommendation which Umalusi could be making is for the design of national external assessments, which learners could write. This could be done under the auspices of a SETA, on a national basis, or by the Department of Labour, or by recognized national assessment bodies such as the IEB.

Private providers

The private sector in provision at an FET level is vast and to a large extent unknown. Few providers seem to be comparable to the public FET institutions. This is complicated by a

large number of small providers offering specialised programmes. The area is not assisted by the fact that the Department of Education has not yet registered private providers. However, forthcoming research from the HSRC in this regard should assist; the HSRC is engaged in mapping out the entire private sector in terms of the kinds of providers in existence, and their nature. It is recommended, therefore, that Umalusi should not rush into developing policies in this regard, but should rather wait until there is more known about the sector as a whole. However, this should not preclude Umalusi from including private providers in decisions that it is taking at a systemic level and to include them in a consultative forum.

In terms of private provision, if there is a national system for the testing of specific fields and qualifications, private institutions should be able to register learners against those assessments. As such, they would obviously also have to meet the accreditation requirements of Umalusi. Their learners would then be able to obtain certificates from Umalusi.

For private providers which wish to offer only their own certificates in general vocational qualifications, the issue is more complicated (it is not at all clear how many of these are in the system, as many providers seem more focused on specific occupational areas). It is possible that they could simply be required to be registered by the DoE, and allowed to issue their own certificates. However, there is the potential for abuse of learners in such a system. While it will be difficult for Umalusi to deal with the vast numbers of providers, possibly it should take decisions about dealing with large ones, even if they are issuing their own certificates. It could require them to meet certain basic minimums.

An overview of international practice with regard to the quality assurance of outcomes based TVET assessment

Separate research was conducted by Daryl Mclean on international practice. In this document we would like to raise a caution about international policy sharing. As Michael Young (2003) argues, the broad functions of preparation for work and selection for jobs, which are generally associated with vocational education, are common to all countries; so is some form of the academic/vocational divide, and the frequent corollary of low status of vocational qualifications. However, these things happen in very different ways in various countries. There are also differences in extent of the esteem with which vocational education is regarded. Useful comparisons are therefore extremely difficult. Young further argues that vocational education in different countries is located in different institutional contexts and in different histories, and involve different roles and assumptions for the state, for educational institutions, for employers, and for other social partners. However, he argues that an examination of the ways that vocational qualifications are organized in other countries can enable us to question some of the assumptions and purposes of our own systems, and can highlight aspects which we take for granted.

Some key international systemic differences in provision and systemic organisation of vocational education[3]

- In some countries, such as continental Europe, and South East Asia, the state has played a key role in the development of vocational education. In the UK, and USA, on the other hand, the state has played a minimal role.
- There are still significant differences between countries with a weak role for the state. One is the professional/vocational division in some countries is very marked (e.g. UK, SA), in other countries such as the USA it is minimal.
- Related to the professional/vocational divide is the relationship between higher education and vocational education (e.g., in SA currently you can hardly go to higher education on the basis of a qualification obtained in an FET college, as opposed to Finland, in which vocational institutions at a secondary level prepare learners to continue at a higher education level). In the USA, on the other hand, degree courses are available in vocational or applied subjects.
- In countries where the state has played a strong role, a significant difference is the extent to which TVET is built on employer-led institutions (like apprenticeships), and established through social partnerships with trade unions (Young lists Germany, Austria, Denmark, and parts of Switzerland as the main examples) and countries in which TVET is part of mainstream educational provision, based on an assumption that employers will always be reluctant contributors (examples here are the Nordic countries, France, Singapore, and Scotland). Young points out that in Scotland educationalists have played a prominent role in the development of vocational qualifications.
- The location of certification is crucial. The UK, for example, has separate awarding bodies. In other countries, certification is organized within the state, or within social partnerships.
- The extent to which qualifications are treated by the state as separate instruments of policy (significantly the case in South Africa, with our strongly qualification-led reform, but also the case in England and Australia with regard to certain vocational qualifications)
- The extent of involvement of industry and private companies, and the nature of the involvement – social partnerships, local collaboration and involvement with colleges, professional associations.

We therefore caution against simplistic interpretations of policies in other countries. Policy on quality assurance, in particular, is not just related to a whole range of issues in the given country, but, specifically, it relates to the policies and systems of provision and assessment. Looking at quality assurance outside of this context can be highly misleading.

[3] We are grateful to Professor Michael Young of the Institute of Education, University of London, for the information and analysis below.

The logistical and conceptual limitations of quality assurance

We feel it is important to take note of the limitations of quality assurance. Although the term 'quality assurance' has developed to imply a process-driven approach which does not just measure outputs, as 'quality control' implies, quality assurance cannot, in fact, assure the provision of quality education. What it can do is provide some checks and balances in a system of provision, and make sure that systems are in place to monitor provision and assessment.

Michael Young (personal communication, 2003) argues that quality assurance systems are something that some countries have gone for in a big way, others in a modest way and others not at all. Those that have gone down the quality assurance route (relatively modestly) like the UK have continued to rely on exam boards and inspectorates in addition to any quality assurance systems. He argues that all these systems are involved in questions around improving quality although they are not called quality assurance systems.

Those who have not gone down the 'quality assurance' route (continental Europe is a good example) have much more explicitly corporate systems where the government departments (national but sometimes regional as in the case of Germany) are much more closely involved in delivery. Quality assurance approaches tend to be found in the more voluntarist 'weak state' systems as a form of regulation of public money often spent by non-public bodies—sometimes private profit making and sometimes private 'charities' or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). He argues that quality assurance, seen in this light, is the attempt on the part of the state to regulate what it cannot or does not want to control.

In addition, the logistical limitations of quality assurance should be considered. The amount of assuring that a quality assurance agency does is limited by the time and resources available to the agency, as well as by some sense of how much energy it is sensible to put into checking that a system is working, in relation to how much money is spent on the system itself. A major question in this regard is how assessment is organized.

For example, if the assumption remains that examinations and other forms of external assessment should be minimal, and should be replaced by internal assessment, the accreditation of providers and the moderation of assessment will have to be extremely extensive and therefore expensive, unless high levels of trust in provision are built up over time.

The NQF Consultative Document agrees with the NQF Review that the requirement for registered assessors should only apply to workplace assessment. However, we want to stress here that the capacity in our system is probably insufficient for assessment to take place only internally if comparability across the system is seen as desirable. And this is a debate in itself for certain areas of study.

Moderation if assessment was internal only would also have to be unrealistically detailed, and an unrealistic amount of assessments would have to be moderated. Moderators would have to be deployed to thousands of providers around the country. Even if only the state system is considered, to moderate the assessment of a range of programmes taking place at 50 institutions would clearly take up more than the 52 weeks of the year. If one assumes that quality assurance depends on moderation, quality assurance bodies would have to have armies of moderators, to be deployed to the thousands of providers and workplaces around the country. All these moderators would have to have subject expertise in the appropriate fields, as well as expertise in assessment. In some countries assessment is conducted internally at secondary levels in the system. However, for such a system to function, there needs to be a high level of professionalism in the lecturing staff, and a large degree of trust built up over time. It is conceivable for the South African system to start moving in this direction. Another alternative is for providers to issue their own certificates, but this does not seem desirable at the moment, nor would the public institutions in most cases want to. Thus, it appears to us that for Umalusi to issue certificates, there needs to be a common assessment task or exam. This entails a common stipulated syllabus, and not simply a list of learning outcomes against which a range of different learning programmes can be designed.

Another quality assurance question which is related, although this document deals specifically with the quality assurance of assessment, is accreditation of providers. Logistical capacity is an issue here, in terms of how many providers a quality agency can deal with in a meaningful manner. Thus, from a logistical point of view, decisions need to be taken about the level of engagement, as well as the size of providers that can be dealt with, and the number that will be.

It should also be noted that quality assurance can give some indications of likely quality and likely problems but quality assurance processes can also be glib and can mask real problems. An organisation can comply with all quality assurance requirements and still produce very poor education; similarly, it is possible for an organisation to provide very good education without complying with requirements, or being able to articulate their systems in the bureaucratic format that a quality assurance agency is likely to require. A particular problem here is the notion of a pre-packaged 'Total Quality Management System', as opposed to building checks and balances into line functions.

In this document, we argue that quality of provision has to improve through line-functions. In other words, quality assurance should try to help institutions to ensure that at all levels, staff are doing what they should be, and that there are sufficient checks and balances in the system to pick up problems.

5. CASE STUDIES OF PUBLIC FET INSTITUTIONS

PURPOSE AND METHODS

Purpose

This section of the research is qualitative and interpretative. It aims to provide a composite picture of practices, based on the experiences of college staff on 5 state multi-purpose FET campuses. It does not aim to generalise from the research findings, but aims to use these findings to generate options for Umalusi on the quality assurance of assessment. Options for the quality assurance of assessment thus emanate from the data, or are illustrated or supported by the data. Where possible, generalisations within the data are given as 'typical' cases.

Data

The study draws on the views of respondents in two colleges, across 5 campuses. Interviews were set up with different categories of staff: college rectors, lecturers (both experienced and inexperienced), skills development facilitators, skills managers, learnership managers, assessors and examiners, moderators and quality assurance officers. Twenty-five members of staff were interviewed, in either individual or group interviews. The interviewees represented a range of study areas: engineering, business studies, haircare, cosmetology, food, catering, and retail. The views of a few students were solicited to serve as a brief verification of lecturers' claims on assessment. In addition, 3 members of the Umalusi staff were interviewed.

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured, and the interview tools for the different categories of respondents can be found in appendix A. Where possible, responses were captured verbatim.

Analysis

The data was first saturated, then organised by emergent themes, framed by an analysis of relevant policies. Although all aspects of the education systems are seen to pertain to assessment and the quality assurance thereof, we have omitted certain concerns expressed by respondents, such as concerns about funding and details of learners' histories.

Ethics

For purposes of anonymity, we have not attributed quotations to individuals, nor have we identified the colleges concerned. We had assured interviewees of anonymity prior to the collection of data, and though respondents did not indicate discomfort with the airing of their views, we nevertheless honour our original assurance of anonymity.

THE MODIFICATION OF THE IDEALS OF ASSURANCE

This section reflects on some of the conflicts between the ideals and practicalities which emerged through the research process.

Bureaucratic versus developmental quality assurance

Umalusi's approach is that quality assurance, while aimed at standardization, should also have a developmental function—one that impels providers toward good provision and assessment. Importantly then, quality assurance should be more than a technical exercise, for it is possible to meet superficial requirements without quality assurance in any way reflecting or developing quality.

Three paths: what determines the path?

Umalusi sees its primary role around institutionalised learning. It sees three possible paths in the band: general academic, general vocational and industrial occupational. In taking a more general stance, one needs to ask questions about 'how much' vocational orientation to include, which pertains to both breadth and depth of the curriculum. Umalusi sees the 'general' as a preparation for the 'vocational'; institutionally based approaches are 'knowledge based', though with a vocational focus. Umalusi feels that within the framework of 'general' the colleges should be permitted some latitude, but that college offerings should not be framed by industry needs.

This study will indicate differences of opinion about the relationship of general and vocational orientations. If colleges are given latitude to offer qualifications or parts of qualifications through other bodies, the process of standardization and certification remains the confusing hybrid seen in the colleges, as will be documented below.

The ideal

The ideal of quality assurance of assessment for Umalusi would be simple. It would entail a process of verification, not interference. Judgements would be made by an assessor, followed by a process of internal or external moderation, or both; a process that would look for consistency across assessors, or areas, or campuses or colleges; a process that would aim to identify discrepancies to ensure that expectations and performance are at a comparable level; and that processes are consistent. External moderators could look at the reports and files of the institutions, and at the internal moderation processes. Umalusi would verify the moderation processes, in a hierarchical manner. 'The verification process is just, 'Did moderation take place? Did assessment take place? Were learners enrolled on the right level?' It is systemic not content'. The responsibility for assessment and moderation would be at provider level.

Possibilities in the current context

However, at least initially, Umalusi perceives that it will have to do more than this, 'In the beginning we might have to help out if we feel unsatisfied. We might have to get external moderators in where needed', especially, as 'we are too young in the NQF'.

Perhaps in the long run too, moderation may have 'two legs', internal and external, where an external moderator moves across institutions or areas, serving as a middle person between the internal moderators and the verifiers who will only look at the processes. However, reservations were expressed about the SETAs sharing this view.

Perhaps, only one moderator level will be needed as assessors become 'more competent in doing what they are supposed to do'. This ideal is for the future, a future with competent providers, and need for moderators outside the providers only for benchmarking. But for now, assessors, moderators and verifiers need guidance, with Umalusi taking a lead in the development and support of these functions in assessment and the quality assurance of assessment.

Implications for intervention

At present, Umalusi finds itself moderating the national examination, on a subject-related basis, 'We appoint people who decide whether the exam paper is fine. It has already been through the DoE process. We will then have a verifier who will pull a few scripts…check on the marks…', sometimes returning a negative verdict. Such a negative verdict, which pertains to the quality of outcomes, 'When we moderate exam scripts we feel that they are not competent enough', has implications for the way Umalusi may have to operate, for if it finds that 'quality' is absent, a more interventionist approach to provision would be required, assuming that the 'processes' are adequate.

Two arms of monitoring

Monitoring is a term used to capture the verification process itself, but it is also used in relation to monitoring provision. Umalusi sees a role for pointing out 'flaws in the systems', for finding the 'roots of the problem' as 'quality assurance has to go right down…' Accepting that view, we offer options that derive from the findings for a more interventionist approach in the quality assurance of assessment through monitoring.

COMPLEXITIES IN THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ASSESSMENT

This section attempts to reflect on the complexities of the quality assurance of assessment which emerged through the research process.

Standardization, competence, evidence and judgement

For the new qualifications, an ideal expressed would be for colleges to have some say in what and how they assess. Umalusi would be there to 'quality assure what they have done. You will see it through standardization. If we feel there is not enough evidence to prove that the learner is competent we will say so'. Here, Umalusi's role would go beyond that of verifying processes, as implied *here is a judgement of kept evidence in relation to some 'understood' sense of competence*.

The notions of standardization and competence are complex, are not operationally definable, and are understood in terms of some sense of 'shared understanding' within a 'community of practice'. How one comes to at best partial agreement about competence

and how to judge it across contexts will depend on working together across institutions, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Umalusi's role in this then becomes one of getting institutions to speak to one another about expected levels of competence, and what constitutes sufficient evidence for this.

The authority of 'standards'?

The notion of 'competence' is unpacked through the utterances of respondents in this study. One respondent used the term to 'prove', rather than to 'judge' competence. Implicit here is a sense of absolute standard; and one that can be reflected accurately through assessment. Such a view may be held by many in the college sector, especially because of the notion of 'standard' introduced through the 'unit standard' approach to qualifications, as evidenced in utterances such as, 'The standards will tell them whether there needs to be an examination'.

There are evident contradictions in the way 'standards' in unit standards are seen. One view is that standards depend on the viewer, 'If more then one ETQA looks at those unit standards you are not going to get the same level of quality'.

The role of discussion

Umalusi could continue to encourage debate about judgement implicit in assessment, the relative nature of standards, and the role of intersubjective agreement on what constitutes a 'standard'. The call for some standardization of quality guidelines could be addressed by the identification and prioritising of key areas for development, using guides to good practice, which Umalusi could develop (for example, the HEQC Guides to Good Practice).

Benchmarking

Benchmarking was embraced by some as good and necessary: 'If it doesn't happen, how are you checking that your quality is at the right level?'. Benchmarking, respondents indicated, would be done through the 'standardization processes, a process that would in some way determine the 'right' level.

Comparable international bodies were cited as ways to assist this process. One respondent talked about his trip abroad as an eye-opener, especially in relation to global trends. However, Umalusi would have to assess on what bases international bodies are comparable. One criterion may be 'suitability to context'.

Benchmarking and exit level competence

To one Umalusi respondent, the quality assurance process requires, 'validating at the end whether the learner really did acquire the necessary skills and theory'. The view that only cross comparison will enable one to determine whether the learner has learned enough was voiced, 'You could think your learner has reached quite a lot but when you compare them with other learners then only you will know'. Implied here is a notion of cross comparison at the learner level, taking the process away from only a verification of process. This would require working with educators.

Policies

Umalusi has compiled a policy document on assessment, to discuss with moderators and examiners, but with no plan for direct communication with educators, as it sees this as the provider's responsibility. However, educators feel cut off from information about assessment (see under relationship with department). Umalusi sees itself as responsive to both SAQA and the providers.

COLLEGE ATTITUDES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ASSESSMENT

Acceptance of quality assurance

Quality assurance was seen in relation to broad international practices, and the need for compliance with quality assurance was not questioned by any of the interviewees. Rather, the intention of developing quality assurance measures was expressed, but with confusion about how best to undertake this, despite some commitment.

Procedures and will

Quality assurance was seen as a way of showing Umalusi that they, the colleges, had a manual with policies, guidelines and procedures to be followed by staff, and 'because of these procedures, I can say I am okay'. One college planned to have a strategic workshop with all 6 campuses to establish how to implement quality assurance, through the setting of targets for quality. The purpose was to meet or exceed certain standards: 'QA is to provide a good service and I must also be enjoying what I am doing and developing as well'. This interviewee added, 'but also to my own enjoyment because then I will move out on my own. I will not be forced'. This could imply that part of quality assurance might be the inculcation of attitudes of willingness and care. This is a tough call and one that would have to happen through the provider.

Quality assurance, while a requirement for accreditation, was understood by some respondents in the colleges as a notion of accounting or marketing: 'National says to us, 'You must be a good centre, have good people, providing a good service''.

On one hand, quality was seen by some to depend on broad management planning. Workshops would involve rectors and council members as well as staff members and some students, facilitated by an outside company (though in one case, the staff selected were those that had been on capacity development workshops). On the other hand, others saw quality assurance as a separate process, not linked to accountability through usual line functions; it was seen somehow as a purchasable system that required technicist implementation.

Implementation confusion

While interviewees expressed no negative views on the quality assurance of assessment, they spoke of some confusion regarding how to go about quality assurance in the colleges. One quality officer expressed that she had no idea about quality. She felt she needed training and support, despite the purchase of a 'quality management system' or

toolkit (complete with CD ROMS, manuals, in a suitcase, at a cost of about R60 000, and noted by another campus interviewee to be 'SABS approved'). Another interviewee referred to this purchased 'system' as a 'nightmare suitcase'. For others, 'It is quite an impressive set of stuff. You can use ISO900. My frustration is I am not trained in quality. I don't know where I must start and what I must do'.

Respondents indicated that the campuses need to come up with a plan for the implementation phase, but wish for support from their 'consultants'. Some consultants came up with a support plan that involved seeing all staff, but this was too expensive for the college: 'Because of our financial constraints we could not implement. We were going to get them in as a company'.

It seemed that none of the campuses that purchased this suitcase have really put anything in place. What seems more useful than the notion of purchasing a system is building on colleges existing capacity to plan, implement, monitor, and review provision.

Umalusi could commission research to look at these purchased systems, evaluate their implementation, their usefulness and the conditions under which they are useful, for it seems like colleges are putting scarce resources into purchases that may not be useful without support. In addition colleges could be encouraged to see their own capacity, perhaps through support at management level.

The insecurity seen was not universal among respondents. One quality officer spoke confidently of being in control across campuses, demonstrating her sense of being 'in charge' with printed flow charts and organograms.

Those campuses that have taken a 'private' route in quality assurance provided some insights for a way forward, in particular the need to attempt to overcome a perceived lack of commitment through perhaps a lack of confidence, or sense of capacity, with regard to implementation of quality assurance measures: 'The other thing probably is a lack from the college itself. Maybe it should form part of the strategic plan of the whole campus'. Note here the inference that quality should not be seen as separate from line functions in the context of an overarching strategic plan.

Waiting for direction/directives

A desire to 'do something rather than nothing' was expressed and colleges intended to begin to implement quality measures on a small scale, implying a desire for measured rather than radical changes. Colleges were waiting for specific requirements for quality assurance, and though they refer to having had internal systems before, there is a sense that they are waiting for new directives and some external help with quality assurance.

Assessment and quality assurance

However, the picture of quality assurance in assessment was more specific:

> But in exams, there are specifics, there are hundreds of national specifics. You must do this. You may not do that. Students may not enter without IDs. There is hundreds. Those are DoE requirements. Umalusi will send people to monitor. They just pitch.

Many processes and mechanisms for the quality assurance of assessment were in place, and these could be identified and built on.

A CONTEXTUALISED ROLE FOR UMALUSI

The ideal and obvious role for Umalusi would be to verify processes of assessment. However, the policy context and the nature of provision and current assessment practices impel Umalusi to adopt a more interventionist approaches to the quality assurance of assessment. Umalusi finds itself moderating exam scripts and monitoring processes, and acknowledges the need to move to 'a more serious and in depth process', such as to become involved in statistical moderation despite seeing this as a role of the provider.

Umalusi finds itself in a difficult position in many different ways. Where sector related qualifications could be moderated by the sector, with Umalusi as a verifier, ETQAs undertake this verification role. Umalusi needs to verify for its providers, 'we need to look at the processes, see if we are happy, and look at the fundamentals, and then verify. But the SETA ETQAs think that they should do the verification. They can't check on the processes of our providers'. This view holds that the SETAs should moderate, and Umalusi verify.

Ideals and practices

The relationship between the NQF ideals and 'real' practices in the colleges are complex. The discussion below provides a flavour of the issues that Umalusi is likely to encounter, and the implications for the quality assurance of assessment.

In transition

The colleges and the campuses that comprise them are in transition in many ways and the pace of change has led some to lose motivation because, 'nothing is constant any more and things don't seem to be falling into place'. For others it is not fast enough, as they fear that they are losing ground to private 'competitors'.

While colleges offer traditional qualifications, for example, in Business Studies and Engineering, they are also introducing learnerships and skills workshops, and see new niches in these. But clearly processes in these are different, and the colleges find themselves between old and new systems. In assessment, the 'old' is based on traditional examinations, seen as functional, and the 'new', based on continuous assessment, interpreted variously, and incomplete in both form and process.

Colleges are moving toward training for outcomes-based education (OBE), but implementation of new training received is not always possible in traditional offerings. Nor is it possible always to provide the quality of teaching desired, in courses that are run over ten weeks, with considerable examined content. Time is cited as a major problem in the 'old' system.

The examination, devised in the old system, is now criticised by some for not being 'outcomes-based', and rather 'stereotyped', indicating some dissatisfaction with the 'old' ways. But national exams help the lecturers to, 'know what they are doing'.

A particular problem is that learners who have been through an OBE system in grades 7, 8, and 9, are struggling to come to terms with an 'examination only' system on entering the college: 'They were in groups, they worked together, they did portfolios, they got reports with smiling faces. Now they get to grade 10, they are only assessed on exams, no more smiling faces…' and 'These poor kids are getting lost in the system'.

Old and new systems and the implications for assessment

Unit standards and whole qualifications

Interviewees embraced many aspects of the new unit standards, but some reported a sense of dissatisfaction with the 'bittiness' of the system,

> Unit standards are a bit too broken up. The old modular system was different, for example domestic wiring would encompass basically our distribution board, plug switches, stove and light circuits. Unit standards break these down into smaller units and increase the administrative work. Domestic wiring should be a module. Testing on the module as a whole works.

Others spoke of how one would combine unit standards to make up a 'subject'. For Umalusi, the integrity of assessment would need consideration. A disaggregation of skills that are tested separately may compromise the coherence and integrity of a qualification. Integrated assessment was posited as way to draw disparate units together, and could include assessment of fundamentals.

Assessment, quality, and exit level outcomes

Not all views of 'struggles' were negative. A trainer's view was that often one had to work under pressure in industry. Being assessed only under comfortable conditions may not be an accurate assessment of what the learner can do in the workplace: 'A lot of trade requires you to work under pressure, e.g. a lift mechanic. If he can't work under pressure, he is not competent and people die'.

This leads to a consideration of outcomes, and assessment in the workplace. Some respondents did not see certification and competence as the same. They would rather assure exit level competence than assure processes. In Business Studies, for example, practical tasks like filing, and client relationships, missing in traditional assessment,

many felt, need to be developed and assessed in the workplace—though this would depend on how general, general vocational, and occupational paths were defined.

One view of quality in this sector incorporated the notion that exit level outcomes were linked to industry needs: 'The consumers want quality jobs'. Perhaps Umalusi does need to consider exit competences in quality assurance as 'fitness for purpose', but again this would depend on the prior definitions of general, general vocational, and occupationally specific qualifications. If these purposes for the technical colleges are not clear, one of Umalusi's priorities would be to provide interim working definitions so that colleges can be clear of the parameters within which they work. Once the purposes are clearer, through assertions of what is or what is not the business of the colleges, then the decisions about outcomes such as, 'can work under pressure', would be easier to agree on. The implications for student comfort, for example, could then be inferred in relation to stated purposes and the authenticity and coherence of assessment. A widely aired view was that the gap between theory and practice is 'a big void'.

New roles in the new pedagogy

In the old pedagogy, the weak students would have been expected to put in more hours. Now, they can take longer to be declared 'competent'. This is an ideal that was seen as too demanding on resources. To teach and assess in an integrated way requires, 'Internet access, books, and resource on the campus. It can work if you have a facilitator and a separate assessor, where the facilitator can help and guide and someone else has to assess when the student is ready'. Implied is a re-positioning of staff in the new pedagogy as fellow learner-facilitators, hence the perceived need by this respondent for a separation of teaching and assessment functions, as is found in the 'old' system.

Increased demands

The ideals of new assessment practices are perhaps unsustainable, at least now, with present resources. Through Umalusi comes the caution that one does not 'fatten the pig by weighing it too often', and that teaching should not be sacrificed for assessment. In the old skills training, one found continuous assessment on the practical, but now there was 'forced paperwork' for the same thing. There was dissatisfaction on the ground with bureaucratisation that certainly cannot be taken to scale. The colleges spoke of rather getting finished with training rather than the paperwork, or else someone else had to carry their load so they could do the paperwork. However, paperwork was seen as useful to keep for evidence, by both learners and educators.

ASSESSMENT METHODS AND SYSTEMS

Assessment was typically seen as a process that aimed to be objective and to accurately reflect 'facts' about student performance. For many there was an assumption about assessment's capabilities of measuring 'true potential'.

Examinations

Mixed practices

Colleges have a range of practices from national examinations, to unique practices in the workshops and learnerships. Some of the examinations are purely internal, some external, and some a mixture, such as the computer courses that are international, with assessments set externally, marked internally under an accredited centre manager, and certificated by the college.

In some, learners are registered for the GDE or IEB matric examinations, mostly for a 're-matric' (on one campus there are about 40 students a subject for matric). The NSC is offered for technical subjects. N courses have depended on a now defunct apprenticeship system.

In addition, some campuses offer 'non-formal' short courses of 4-5 days duration; this includes courses such as reading skills, which are tested both practically and in written form. The reading course for example is computer based, with its own internal assessment.

Examinations

For now, the main type of assessment in the colleges is the written national examination, externally set and marked. The campuses do submit a year mark for students, which they believe counts 40% in most cases, though the questionnaire data reflects variations in this proportion. The understanding is that there is some formula (unknown to the respondents) applied to these mark combinations. Umalusi could urge the provider to give educators information on the formulae in the spirit of transparency.

Students are timeously informed about the content for tests and examinations, much of it requiring memorisation.

Class marks are compiled largely through tests, both informal and formal class tests. Students reportedly dropped on the major examination by 10-20%. A view in Umalusi was that site based assessment has too great a range.

Though the national exam was accepted as a useful practice, decisions about 'how much' it should count varied. Umalusi should consider what factors might be involved in setting this percentage, in terms of the relationship between standardization, centralisation, what can be tested in a 'mass' way versus what can only be tested on site, with at least a partial shared sense of expectations.

Some examination processes for national examinations

Examinations are set a year before the assessment date, and this was seen by a respondent as a way to increase fairness, as the examiners forget what they have set.

From an examiner's perspective, papers are set bearing in mind what the learners should know and be able to do, including some memorising of useful formulae in maths and engineering subjects.

One examiner classified questions as general, practical questions, and those that would discriminate the excellent candidate from others. The examiner interviewed sets 5 questions for each of 9 modules.

Examiners

The criteria for acceptance as examiners were not clear to all respondents. The understanding was that one was given a 'score', on application and one had to make a confidentiality agreement. It was understood that most examiners had marked before, or had been assistant examiners.

Students reportedly struggled when there was a new examiner, indicating a focus on past papers, and a preparation for a particular kind of exam, almost formulaically, and in some cases, because the examiners had written preparation materials themselves. Umalusi could set up ethical guidelines for assessment practices, identifying practices that could be read as ethically questionable.

Results

The college assessors see the percentage pass rate and get to compare their results with national results, but do not get to see the 'whole picture' of an analysis question by question, area by area, or even campus by campus. One respondent, a quality officer for combined campuses, with loyalties to her original campus, saw the pooled results as 'terrible' for her former campus, as pooled results were used for comparison of colleges, and her campus, 'once the best' she said, is now 'lost on the ladder of results'.

Some reported that when the national results came through electronically, they looked at their own statistics and discussed the results with the HOD. They compared results by lecturer (which they could identify), discussed remedial action, and reported back to the department. In some cases, each campus had to submit results to the college academic board. Colleges could compare their marks to national norms, the aim being to keep marking in the college in keeping with national norms. Discrepancies would be addressed, either by more tests, or by identifying the module as a problem. Again here was an indication that procedures and processes for quality assurances of assessment do exist and can be built on rather than that too many new structures are introduced. Some measures of quality assurance of assessment are in place, but may be unrecognised as such.

A breakdown of the paper by section, with comments on general responses could also be useful for the lecturers. Via the provider and usual line functions, problems in teaching or examination preparation could be identified. Typically, lecturers indicated in the interviews that they would benefit from more information about how their learners performed in the national examinations. In one group of respondents, only the

'examiner', knew that one could have access to an examiner's report looking at how students answered questions on a national level. Lecturers wanted information that pertained specifically to them as well. Pass rates did not really tell them, 'what they are doing right and wrong'.

A breakdown of the results by campus could be useful for Umalusi, the provider and the colleges. This breakdown would give the campus scores in relation to the measures of central tendency, the mean, median and mode, of all colleges, and the upper limit of the range, to provide indicators of both typical and 'best' results. Allowance would have to be made for interpretation of the results, within campus contexts. These campus or college specific results would not be distributed to other campuses, nor would they be used in any way as league tables, but would be used developmentally by the colleges, the provider and the quality assurer. If there were any anomalies or unique results, Umalusi could ask for an investigation by the provider of why there were discrepancies, as it might point to a problem with provision. What this would involve for Umalusi together with the provider is some way of breaking down results by campus, and if feasible, by question. An interpreted analysis, with action statements, could be requested from each head of department in a college. In addition, some form of follow up on action statements made, through the provider, could be a possible requirement from Umalusi, though such management accountability would require review once quality assurance practices are more established in the colleges. In the long term, it is not likely to be sustainable, or desired, for Umalusi.

Backwash effect

The written and content form of the exam has a backwash effect on teaching, where practicals are neglected, as they will not be assessed in this system. Tensions exist between learner needs and the syllabus. In, say, Business studies, although encouraged to change assessment practices, lecturers were reluctant to move away from exam coaching, as they are assessed by their learners' results. Teaching was exam focused because of the limited time to get through work. They thus rarely, if ever, added different assessment tasks in different modalities into the courses.

Procedures

The logistics for the national examination are in place in the colleges, and in some colleges, it is the only form of assessment. Examinations within the colleges have their own procedures. Despite one claim that exam protocol and procedures were lacking, others insisted these were always prescribed. Some claimed that 'they all know how to assess' or can look it up in policy papers, or subject heads will tell them how to do conduct the examinations: 'There is a certain way and you have no choice', even to uniformity on how an exam paper must be type set. Some found this restrictive, but have no jurisdiction about changing policies, though they can play around 'within the rules of application and knowledge proportions'.

Irregularities

But, it was reported, when it came to irregularities, it was left to individual judgement. Here Umalusi could play a role in devising a statement for students, and staff, simply outlining minimum processes and 'rights' in assessment, with lines of appeal should these be infringed. But at the same time, this statement could include the responsibilities of learners and educators respectively in assessment, that hold them to fair and transparent assessment practices, without burdening the system for either.

Practicals and practical competence

As mentioned, desired by most was that these examinations included a practical component. In the traditional system, practical demonstrations were given to complement theory. But these were seen as inadequate, 'Now one demonstrates on a little board, no tools, and plugs missing. One would need to refurbish the whole workshop with modern equipment to bring this [practical work] back'. However, others saw the colleges as reasonably well equipped for practicals, though the equipment was not modern and hence might not be adequate for entry into industry. Overall, the view was that it was easier to remember if you had applied a principle in practice, and easier to problem solve if you had a mental picture of the problem. In science in particular, students needed to be able to picture a problem, and students in engineering ought to know what certain objects look like to understand problems. For example, they needed to know what a sluice gate looked like for understanding centre of pressure. The need for the use of all the senses to aid memory and understanding was expressed. One needed to be hands on, for example, for computer principles. So for the students 'to be able to understand rather than just regurgitate, they need the prac'.

One view was that the practicals did not have to be specialised, but were seen rather as giving the students the 'rod' to fish with. Industry could offer the specialisations later. However, besides the learning benefits of the practicals, a view was that students were not useful in industry without practical skills, especially engineering students. Another view, assuming industry wanted specific skills, is that 'Jacks and Jills' of skills were not competent; and thus not employable. Umalusi could make its position clear to the colleges on its stance on the specificity of the practicals, but might need to be flexible if colleges need to respond in a specific way to the market to keep financially viable.

The view of what constituted practical competence varied. One campus had the principle that if they taught learners, they would employ them (in services for example), indicating a confidence in their teaching. The claim was that those who did the general qualification had 'low' competence, and that it took 6-8 months to get learners to do things in a particular way. Employers wanted someone who could 'do it right'. The sense was that the college needed to get learners competent in an area, now. Colleges feared having to 'close shop' if they did not meet market needs, and feared that private providers would capture the market as businesses got the skills levy back. One respondent urged Umalusi to act on this on their behalf by putting political pressure on the DoE. Typically, the colleges reported being ready and 'capacitated' for change that meets the needs of commerce, industry and the community.

Other concerns

Language

Seen in context, the national examinations, while offering standardization, also mitigated against learners with language difficulties. Learners might be able to provide verbal responses well, but struggled to write, making the national exams, 'a bit of a thriller'.

Continuous assessment: theory and practice

Continuous assessment was a term respondents used, but the form of continuous assessment for many was in the old tradition, that of written tests in subjects where students undertake national examinations. As such, there was some acknowledgement that the term is not used in the 'true' sense, and it is only in 2004 that 'OBE must start'. Some colleges are starting to get continuous assessment under way, including an assessment of practicals—but for a minority of students. Some have none at all. The range typically included assignments and class tests, often testing practical subjects in a written from, such as 'office practice'. This affected the pedagogy, 'Putting theory into practice is a problem, so giving a written practical exam pulls it apart again'.

Continuous assessment would require an assurance for Umalusi that the assessment is properly managed, with the provision of equivalent of validation tests for site based and continuous assessment. An option is that of common assessment tasks, some internally marked, for the formative development of the college, and others summatively for accountability of the college in terms of standardization.

Colleges, and within colleges, departments, set their own standards for passing. For example in one college, in 'hair', a student needs 80% for the theory and 70% for the practical.

Typically, all course marks are recorded, so little or nothing is formative only. Written feedback in some colleges takes the form of commenting on perceived student effort, such as, 'You didn't study'.

Skills workshops

Skills workshops are found in some colleges. In one college, 45 out of approximately 200 students were in the 'skills workshops', but workshops were not found on all campuses, though colleges intend to introduce them. We do not go into the kind of detail provided in the interviews on the workshops, but hone in rather on the nature of assessment and issues around it. Suffice it to say, trainers find the demands great, as they have responsibilities for the equipment and student safety in addition to teaching and assessing.

These workshops are offered by the colleges in response to market needs, but courses are not accredited and are assessed only internally. Nothing gets sent to the department. Learners are given a college certificate.

The workshops include engineering skills, such as wiring and welding, fitting and machining, motor mechanical, and others such as life skills, reading, and keyboard. Workshops typically involve groups of about 10-15 students.

Outcomes and assessment

Outcomes were generally set from a sense of the standards needed in industry, and criteria for meeting these outcomes were seen as clear, integrating theory and practical, but with a practical focus. The outcomes of some courses were expressed in a book that is given to learners. This included information about assessment.

Because of the close nature of working with students to develop practical skills, some respondents' views were that, '[a]ssessing one's own students would be unfair on both trainer and student'. Assessment might be better effected if undertaken by an 'outside' assessor, though this assessor could be from another campus in the college.

There is little or no moderation, though some of the campuses are using the mergers to cross check assessment in a process of internal moderation within the college, but external to the campus. Moderation is informal and internal. Colleges spoke of the need for moderator training.

Self-assessment tasks were considered by the lecturer or facilitator who could ask the learner to demonstrate certain skills, such as filing or drilling. These skills were assessed against a checklist, sequenced developmentally, looking at aspects of the skill. For example in some engineering tasks, assessors would look at wrist action, or wrist arm action.

Assessment might include tests to see if learners knew what instruments to use if given a 'magic box'. In 'wiring' a practical test could be the design, wiring and testing of a single-phase circuit, with a built in assessment—whether it worked or not. 'What if' questions were also asked.

The assessment process meets the ideal of 'testing until competent'; in one case, a student had been assessed five times.

Time is a problem in assessment in the workshops as the trimester is reportedly too short for both training and assessment to be 'properly' conducted.

Procedures and progress

Students are given help to prepare for the assessments, given explicit criteria, and permitted to proceed at different rates in the practical skills—they need to be competent at one level before moving to others, as many of the skills are hierarchically developed.

Some used a checklist for every module, including observation of 'housekeeping' and 'approach to the job'.

Feedback

Feedback in the workshops is verbal or written, with a mid-term report based on attendance, behaviour and observation of performance. Students are given individual feedback.

Students may have to produce and keep evidence of work completed. Formative assessment results are recorded on forms and students have a chart to show completed modules.

Students are asked opinions about assessment, and if they complain, an attempt is made to address their concerns, 'by the fairest process'; '[I]f a student is informed it helps'. In general respondents expressed that feedback aimed to be encouraging and developmental, as well as affirming where appropriate.

Accreditation and credibility

Unit standards in some areas, like the electrical area are in place. Attempts have been made by workshop trainers to get their programmes accredited, or approved, but 'obstacles' to accreditation include the demand for a 'total quality management system'. The trainer has to go to obtain permission from the department to offer the workshop, then to Umalusi to get permission to go to the SETA. Communication with the SETA is via the college management and Umalusi. Attempts have been made to register the workshops with relevant SETAs, a process in some SETAs that is facilitated by 'knowing someone'.

Some believe that internally offered qualifications are recognised by industry because the college is a registered institution, in other words, the college itself has credibility. Synchronisation of the system and structure is said to be needed, 'else there will be no car to drive'.

The importance of the trade

The trade dominates in assessment, and it was said to be easier to add an educator perspective to someone who knew the trade, than to have a trained assessor, who didn't know the trade. This speaks against a notion of generic assessment. This 'trainer sees the need for more than the trade, as 'there is a difference between being do with hands, and being a responsible plumber'.

Desires for standardization

There is little standardization of these skills workshops, 'Each person in the practical is doing his own thing', even though they might be doing similar things. Some desired that everything be based on unit standards, assessed on a continuous basis, through well thought through standardised assessment tasks that test all outcomes. A view was evident that unit standards are a way to standardise across practical skills, skills that can be observed, and where perhaps a working final product is the test.

Standardization was a theme that ran through many interviews, including the view that first standardization was needed and then permission to diverge a bit, that freedom was desired but within parameters. This speaks to the approach of minimum standards and guidelines for good practice given. Minimum standards need not be onerous, and should aim to minimise technical abuse that aims meet the letter rather than the spirit of the law. Through communication, this can be continually emphasised.

Demands

Some lecturers did not wish to continue to develop the skills workshops, as assessment practices were seen to demand too much time and much work.

Learnerships

Learnerships are a small but growing part of the colleges. For example, at one college, the first 20 learners were completing a learnership at NQF level 2 in the wholesale and retail sector. Though permission to give learnerships comes from the department, learnerships fall under the SETAs. Most of the students in the learnerships are from industry and have come for a theoretical orientation. An intention is expressed that some new courses will be examined through the SETA, for example, the 'THETA course' in catering.

Learnerships are quality assured by SETAs. They are assessed by accredited assessors (required to accredit the qualification by SETA), internally, using a set of unit standard outcomes, that include assessment guidelines on knowledge and applied skills.

Professionalism and rigour

Some viewed examinations in the learnerships as very 'professional', with two examiners, one internal and one external. The view that the examiners were 'like vultures watching' provides a picture of rigour.

Site based and college based assessment

Much assessment happens at the employing institution, though some assessments are conducted at the colleges. The industry specific assessment of a theoretical nature may be assessed at the college and results fed to the company, who in turn hand these on to the SETA. Some of the companies had expressed a desire for the college to assess in the workplace, though this would have to be co-operative. Colleges assess the fundamentals.

Assessment and unit standards

The process of assessment is seen by some to be simple—one just has to apply the instruments that are contained in the unit standard outcomes. This implies a need for some guidelines and instruments that will contain the insecurity in assessment.

Moderation

Some sectors try to have a one examiner across all students, plus an external. The external and internal examiners have to be within 5% of each other, otherwise they have to discuss the assessment. This is a possible approach for Umalusi to take, to set a margin

for error, to acknowledge minor differences in judgement and at the same time, foster discussion where discrepancies arise.

Procedures

Tests vary in modality and content, such as theory tests, role-plays, interviews and observations. In one college, each of the 12 unit standards has an assessment guide, developed by two campuses in separate colleges, which took considerable time to develop. Each guide has 2-3 assessment instruments, approved by the SETA.

In the pre-assessment interview, learners are informed about the assessment instruments, expectation, times, and whether the learner needs an interpreter (except for subjects like communication). Target dates for readiness are set, and the tests have time limits.

Role-plays and interviews run at about half an hour each per learner. Umalusi would need to consider time and capacity implications involved in alternative assessments, especially if taken to scale. While these decisions do rest with the provider, Umalusi could avail itself of research on new practices, and encourage the providers to modify practices.

Post assessment, the learner is given feedback, and if 'not yet competent' given a further assessment. Some have been assessed three times, and no guidelines have been provided for how often a learner can be re-assessed. The facilitator will guide the learner in improving. This too has implications for capacity.

Anonymous student evaluations are regular, and include comments on assessment.

Overall the process of assessment aims at openness, and transparency, to help the student, with both the learner and the college compiling files or portfolios of evidence.

Portfolios and evidence

In some learning areas in some colleges, portfolios were 'up to expectations' with assessment, parent feedback, and so on: 'Portfolios are a lot of work, but the evidence is there'. Educators keep the portfolios so students cannot alter pieces of work, or marks. Group sizes have to be small. The maximum size group cited in cosmetology is 12, as the steps in the process, rather than the simply the final product, have to be observed and assessed.

For educators, the ideal practice is to keep the assessment tool with documented procedures of the way it was conducted, as well as samples of student performance.

Portfolios are typically viewed positively, 'it can show a sample of what learners can do and what sort of experience they had'.

Equivalence, and joint accountability

A call for equivalence in terms of credits with Nated subjects was heard.

Colleges find themselves in a joint accountability position with learnerships as they account both to the SETAs and to Umalusi, 'They still have to come to us and say, show me what you have done'.

The perceived tension between Umalusi and the SETA is seen by a rector to delay the process of 'coming up with an assessment instrument' at the institutions; 'It keeps on telling us that the only assessment instrument will be the national examination. And those examinations give your students empty papers'. Hair care was provided as an example, where industry does not recognise the Nated 191; 'The department has not yet closed the gap between themselves and those modules'. Colleges cannot introduce modules without the permission of the department, nor liaise directly with the SETA.

Some general issues

Staff development

It is in skills workshops and learnerships that the boundary between teaching and assessment becomes thin, where development of skills requires ongoing formative assessment. The importance for staff development for the type of teaching and assessing in learnerships was expressed. Equally learners had to learn new ways of taking responsibility for learning.

A lack of shared practice bothered some rectors, 'you only speak about these things in passing', indicating a need to spend more time to 'unpack' new requirements. Uncertainty was evident, and a need for more advocacy expressed.

Standardization at entry level

There is a call from some for standardization at entry level. Some form of entrance aptitude test was suggested, so learners could be assessed for likely success. Currently learners need to be 16 and have a grade 9, but one campus reports a learner with a grade 7. The view that it 'is unfair to take people's money if they are not going to make the grade', has three implications, either one has to screen at entry level, or increase support for learners, or alter expectations. The last is also seen as unfair to go 'out with a certificate that is not deserved, as happens from time to time'. Pre-assessment issues were discussed, and there is a view that learners are not strong. Also 'owe me' attitudes of some students were contrasted to the trade system which made heavy demands on the learners. Assessment in one learnership included a pre-assessment tool to place learners at level 2 or 4.

Authentic assessment

A value for assessing people in authentic contexts was expressed in some interviews, something that was seen as absent in past practices. A problem was noted, that the learners are trained on '3rd world' equipment but expected to work in a '1st world' environment. This is a problem for assessment. Colleges claimed that they don't have the technology and equipment to assess at industry standard.

It was suggested that in the technical fields, one would need two people to conduct the assessments, as there are many different industry foci. Both college assessors and professionals would assess.

Views of undesirable practice

Only 'one method' of assessment is seen by some as 'bad practice', showing the internalisation of new discourses against a history of examination only. But to take on the new speak too thoughtlessly could also be seen as bad practice, 'Now they are hovering to the other side and giving them so many assignments'. This could lead to plagiarism, 'where people are just duplicating research material by writing it down and doing no exams at all'.

Also, colleges are overassessing, 'they are assessing and moderating and the poor learners are so assessed and the lecturers, to actually do all the marking and still find time to teach'.

Some have tried to introduce new practices, such as peer assessment and open book tests, but this latter is 'not the real thing'.

Interviews require time which may be unnecessary for lecturers who have frequent contact with students, such as in the workshops.

If errors in assessment will not seriously affect the candidate, then too much time investment on accuracy was seen as wasteful; 'too many confirmations'.

Learners' views of assessment

The research with students was on a limited scale, largely to ascertain concordance with what lecturers had said or were saying about assessment. There was concord between learners' and lecturers' views of assessment among the few students that were interviewed, with students seeing the assessment process as fair, and procedures rigorous.

The students interviewed indicated that they knew first lines of appeal in case of grievances, though none had had to push the system to its limits. However, these were successful students and student leaders.

The typical impression is that students do not often complain about assessment, perhaps because the process of national examinations does not position the lecturers 'against' them, and practices in the workshops and learnerships are aimed at an ideal. From comments from educators, it seems that though appeals procedures are in place, they are not always known. Stories were told of some students going to the SRC, others to the head of department, and one student went to an industry funder.

Some respondents spoke of the importance of developing a good relationship with learners so that they can raise issues about assessment. But mostly learners were seen not to have choices about assessment. Assessment is just part of the process and is not

something learners should have an opinion about. It is for their benefit. Lecturers do give learners advice and try to teach students to take responsibility.

Learners interviewed speak of a correlation between competence, attitudes and results.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF COLLEGES

Marks

Colleges are held accountable currently by examination marks. One college reported that 'street entries' brought down the overall average of the college, as they were obliged to accept people into the examination who had not been through the courses, and, they claimed, the failure rate was high. Colleges reported not being able to 'refuse' students, as it was the exam, not earlier assessments that was seen as determining competence. Others claimed that part and full time students were separated and hence the overall view of the differences was possible. Some campuses within a college reported that other campuses, with different histories and lower results, brought down the college average and that that reflected badly on the college. The campuses that saw themselves as stronger wanted a disaggreagation of results. This may be useful for identifying campuses needing support, but would need an interpretive dimension to raw results. Colleges are sent national norms on both examinations and year marks.

Performance appraisals

Within colleges, performance appraisals were viewed as part of quality assurance, and educators spoke of the value of target setting, achieving and measuring, and supporting.

Student evaluations

Student evaluations of lecturers may have positive and negative consequences for assessment. New lecturers, for example, were reported to not like 'frowning faces', indicating student dissatisfaction.

Industry feedback

In some learnerships, for example hair and cosmetology, students are 'numbered' and their work in the industry can be traced back to the college through the SETA.

LINE FUNCTIONS

Conflicts

For internal assessors, a line of procedure if in conflict over assessment would be to go to the head of department, and thereafter the campus head. If the problem was with an external assessor, the suggestion was to take the case to the SETA. This again indicated a need to work with chains of command that would be made explicit in procedures. Moderators were seen by some to play a role in cases of appeal. In reality, learners were

unlikely to get past a lecturer in some types of study, e.g. skills, and would just have to do the assessment again.

A view on the ground was that lecturers would be in breach of ethics if students were not informed about their rights to appeal in assessment, though a lecturer holding this view ruefully admitted that he has only 'told' the two learners used for his assessment portfolio. What this 'admission' suggests is that accountability requirements, in this case for assessor accreditation, could well change practice, driven by external demands. The two students he included in his portfolio have been told about their rights of appeal, but he has not told others where it was not required.

Moderation

Subject specialists

That the first line of moderation would be best done by a subject specialist was a typical view among interviewees. In some cases this would be the head of department, who monitors the process of assessment, in others, moderation by peers.

National examinations procedures

In the national examination, moderation is a known procedure. For example, in engineering, the examiner completes the question paper, sends it to the moderator, who 'ensures that the standard is correct'. This was based on experience and an understanding of expectations at that level. Respondents understood that typically the moderator in national examinations is a past examiner, and in the new system, would be an accredited assessor.

We describe a process of moderation in an engineering course to demonstrate that processes and procedures are in place, yet unhappiness about 'quality' as 'fit for purpose' is expressed:

> The moderator checks that the questions derive from the syllabus, and sends corrections and amendments to the examiner, and in some cases provides guidance. The question paper is then sent to the department. It is not clear who has more authority over the paper, the examiner, or moderator, in the event of a dispute. Such relationships need to be clear, and Umalusi could play a role in such clarifications of authority. To control processes of moderation in examinations, a respondent in Umalusi suggests that moderation is done at Umalusi, in a day, to increase security. Recently, examination papers were sent by private couriers – and three or four of them where 'hijacked'.
>
> The paper is assessed by markers, at an assessment centre managed by an exams manager. The manager appoints the markers who must have at least one year experience in teaching the subject. The subject expertise is viewed as more important than assessor knowledge. The role of the moderator is to check the markers are adequately qualified to mark, and are acquainted with the memo,

through reading and discussion in a marking meeting. All anticipated answers are generated and during the marking, new responses are discussed. The aim is not to disadvantage learners. Markers are sensitised to language and context. The moderator takes 10% of the scripts; one from the 20% category, one from the 80% category, concentrating on the 30-39% group. He goes through the scripts question by question. If a marker slips, s/he will be asked to recheck the batch. The marking centre manager captures the marks, separately from the scripts, and sends these to the department, who are then perceived to 'ogive' the marks. This occurs on a tri-annual basis. The fees paid are R10 a script for the marker, and R14 for the moderator. The moderator also sends in a report in a given format, commenting on the syllabus and questions, and makes recommendations to the examiners and lecturers. This process separates assessment from teaching, as lecturers do not see their learners' scripts.

Communication

A moderator interviewed saw the department as 'in between' in communication between lecturers and examiners, 'but they are not good at it.' Recommendations might not always get through to the lecturers, as the process was to give these to the different departments to give to the colleges, and he had no feedback on this process. Umalusi might well play a role in communicating assessment concerns deriving from reports directly with teaching staff, by email, or in workshops.

Learnerships

In the learnerships, moderators are not yet in place, though in one or two cases, moderators from the SETA are found, arranged by the quality assurance person in the college. But external moderators are expensive. The moderators work at the level of checking students' files and speaking to about 6 of 12 learners in a group. While the moderator must be from the industry, the right person is not always found. In hair care for example, someone in management at Swarzkopf could be appointed, but who may not be currently in practice.

Training for moderation

A few members of staff across the colleges have undergone moderator training, the D34, usually the person who oversees areas of study. Moderation training was anticipated, in some cases suggested, for all senior lecturers at post level 2 and heads of department. SETAs were meant to moderate company assessments. One college planned that each head of department, and in some cases also the senior lecturer, would be moderators, who would work across campuses. The heads of schools and the senior officers would be verifiers, and would do the verifier course with the Assessment College of SA, a level 7 course.

Workshops

Some of the workshops have a process of moderation whereby an external moderator is brought in on the day of the assessment, for example, the moderator in catering would be present while students are preparing and serving food. The assessor and moderator discuss the assessment.

Roles and responsibilities

Umalusi has convened a workshop with moderators and examiners to thrash out roles and responsibilities, in response to a conflict. An external moderator is appointed by Umalusi for each of 10 subjects on an annual contract basis. We may consider the stability versus preventing corruption versus financial dimension of this. Moderators are asked to communicate with those a rung below them.

Moderation on site, or in the colleges will be a more complex process than that of moderation of external examinations, though Umalusi sees its role as that of verifying. The moderators should 'check the portfolio assignments and what has happened in all the different methods of assessment'.

Disciplinary procedures for misconduct should be clear to moderators, and Umalusi is working on how to prevent irregularities occurring at a level of seniority. In addition, Umalusi can record decisions taken in response to crises to build precedents.

Verification

The intention is that verifiers will go into the colleges this year. They may visit exam centres unannounced at any stage of the examination process. They will look for irregularities and report these to the Council. Umalusi will compile a report.

Verifiers would have to have a certain level of expertise, a particular level of education, subject knowledge and expertise through experience. This view may be contested, especially by those who see verifier roles crossing areas generically.

Accreditation as a verifier is perceived to be required in the future, following both assessor and moderator training. A respondent in Umalusi has had only one training session with the verifiers, to inform them of what is expected. Umalusi appoints verifiers and moderators on an annual basis, currently one per province.

Umalusi keeps records of final marks, moderator and verifier reports. It keeps a record of all irregularities that it has dealt with, and a record of recommendations and responses.

CERTIFICATION

The process of certification is claimed to be a difficult one, particularly in combating fraud.

Part qualifications

On academic grounds the questions concern certificating learners who have parts of qualifications that fall under different bodies, such as those who have done an industry certificate, and then do the fundamentals. A view in Umalusi is that 'the moment they do the whole thing with the fundamentals included, they will get an exit certificate from

Umalusi', and Umalusi will have the final say because the fundamentals lie with Umalusi.

Currently, it is reported, about 10-20% of students get the full diploma. Otherwise the colleges give out their own certificates, for each unit standard. In cosmetology in one college, students are reported to have waited for 3 year for certificates form the SETA for their practical.

From a college perspective, if a student is to obtain a diploma, for example the N6, they have to prove that they have done practical work outside of the college, via a report from an employer. The college then applies to the department on behalf of the student. If the student fails to find employment, s/he cannot qualify with a diploma, and will 'get stuck' at certificate level. It is the students' responsibility to return to the college to complete the qualification. Giving students more responsibility is seen as positive, but having the student pay R1200 a year and then not end up with a qualification is seen negatively. The colleges see a certain urgency to resolve problems that affect students. If Umalusi sees the 'general vocational' as preparation for vocational work, rather than something occupationally specific, could there be a change to the work requirement and the diploma be issued without work in the industry?

Umalusi has issued a document on its stand on MoUs, and although differences of opinion exist within Umalusi

Relation to the market

Some understand an intention to offer all programmes on a unit standard basis, and believe that Nated offerings in some areas such as hair care and cosmetology will be phased out in 2004. They see a problem with private competitors who can more easily modify courses, and more readily meet market needs. Colleges see a need to be responsive to changes in the market, so if for example there is no longer smoking in restaurants, why teach how to manage it?

The colleges believe they can be competitive because of their standing, and because they can offer courses more cheaply. One respondent reports that at private hotel schools, students pay R50000, while the college asks for R10000. However, hotel schools can offer in-service training, and private schools allow students to take two modules at a time, whereas the colleges only allow one. This is a problem for the colleges as it breaks with the specified number of hours needed for a module. Umalusi could monitor this discrepancy drawing on notional hours and credits, towards equivalence. In cosmetology the private sector also offers a diploma, but in the colleges, students need to work 'outside' before they can get a diploma.

Some did not know the standing of certificates from workshops in industry. One yardstick for success is that some students have been employed following the skills training in the workshops.

Uncertainty of the FETC

Uncertainty about the introduction of the FETC is heard, 'FETC – we don't know whether it will be available in 2006, 7, or 8. Some years ago there were announcements about 2004. We don't know.'

TRAINING AND ASSESSMENT

Pressure for training

Some campuses claimed to have about 10% of lecturers trained as assessors through private providers, and others claimed all. The respondents all spoke about assessor training, indicating a sense of dissatisfaction for training not yet complete. There was a sense of pressure for most in the college to become registered assessors, both from the lecturer and the college perspective. Despite differences of opinion within Umalusi about training, the message received in the colleges visited has been one of an insistence on training, 'Umalusi says we have to have trained assessors'.

However, Umalusi has concurred with the decision taken in higher education not to register specific assessors; that assessment would be part of the professional responsibility of the lecturers, but that lecturers must in some way demonstrate the capacity to assess. This would require some form of judgement of the capacity of the lecturers to assess, which if through line functions, could include mentoring and development, or through an external 'assessor of the assessor'. While the latter could provide a view across colleges, it could also breed resentment, and would itself require a certain level of demonstration of capacity to judge assessors. Though the province is deemed accredited, staff feels an obligation to concentrate on assessor training and quality assurance. Lecturers in one college asked about the relationship between assessor training and quality assurance. A view from Umalusi is that training is not necessary, but colleges are committed to this new certification of competence.

Little was done in the past to provide training on assessment in teacher training colleges for lecturing staff, and staff can see absences in new lecturers for dealing with assessment. It would appear that the push to assessor training has highlighted a need for consideration of assessment issues. 'They seem to have improved'.

Opportunities provided

Assessor training is seen as hard work, but interesting, providing an opportunity to work with colleagues. The training was valued for its ability to expose assessors to different fields. Though little about practice may have changed for the majority of lecturers and students, a view from a verifier is that lecturers may be more empowered. These are values to training that Umalusi needs to consider for developing understanding of 'competence', and one that must be considered before dismissing training.

Funding

In some cases the training was commissioned by a SETA, and in others by the colleges themselves. In some cases SETAs have sponsored assessor training, for example THETA had sent a catering lecturer on assessment training, and MERSETA had offered to fund training for 2 people per campus for technical assessments, but at the time of the interviews, campuses were 'still waiting for a date' from the MERSETA. Others claimed 'little budget' for assessor training from the department, and some colleges have used their own budgets for assessor training. Outside organisations, and international funders have supported assessor training, for example, the Bavarian government. One respondent's view is that R64 million is available in the SETA in his area.

The relationship between training and accountability

As mentioned, training was believed to improve practice; educators think about assessment and different methods of assessing – but these benefits are seen by some as more through an accountability process within the organisation than through the training. Training 'should improve their abilities because you assess them through heads of departments'. This indicates a sense on the ground that while the private providers may train, it is the accountability through line function line function that makes the difference. 'If it were followed by an appraisal then one would be surer that changes due to training were taking place'. And, 'it is a management issue' to follow up on assessor training.

Incompleteness of accreditation

But the training was only the first part. The initial training is 3-4 days, really only enough to support the devising of the first 'tool' to start the portfolio, after which prospective assessors have to compile and submit a portfolio, typically without formal support. One college claimed that of 75-80 educators, 5 had been declared competent and all had done the initial training. Further, while many educators had undergone training, not many had submitted their portfolio, indicating a need for training that included some longer-term support. On another campus, of 20 who had completed the training, three or four had handed in portfolios and two had been declared competent and were awaiting registration. In yet another, all 300 or so lecturers had undergone training and 'only' 3-4 had been declared competent. Most still needed to develop a portfolio of evidence. In the MERSETA, one respondent claims, of the 1290 people trained, about 80 have qualified, despite the expense of the training.

This has two implications for Umalusi: one that assessor training fails to support where it should, and that assessors be recognised more as professionals. The training does appear to have benefits for practice, but lecturers need considerable support to compile portfolios of evidence. Hence, without a large investment in capacity, keeping assessment processes, and evidence requirements simple, is advisable, despite the ideals.

Some who had been 'accepted' were still awaiting their certificates from the ETDP SETA and report that there 'seems to be some problem' in terms of the speed of certification as they had been waiting for about 8 months at the time of the interview.

Some staff members were trained by a company that had had its status revoked. Through a process of 'RPL' and an examination of their portfolios their assessor registration problem should be resolved. One interviewee reports that the GDE had provided very little advice about which provider to use for training, even when 'They wanted to make the jump and start'. Changes in policy confuse those at ground level, with some expressing confusion, for example, that assessor training now has to be registered with the ETDP SETA.

Criticisms of training

Criticism of the training is that it is mostly administrative work.

> 'If every student has to be assessed following that procedure then it is too much work. The amount of admin for the assessor assessment is expensive, in both what you have to do and what you are expected to do with your learners….Some of it is unnecessary and repetitive'.

But others report that it really did change the way they assess, and that there is 'credibility in good assessment'.

Training has made assessment more difficult for some. One respondent reported that in the past she would test the learners within two weeks, and record their mark. Now she has to talk to the students about the module (no longer giving them the answers and hoping for them back), send them out (hopefully) to find the information themselves, and often buy new resource materials herself (such as from Bellingham). The differential paces at which learners may progress, makes it 'horrific' for the facilitator. .

Dependence on formal training. Training and standardization

In some cases one can sense a growing dependency on the notion of training, with respondents citing it is 'needed' for both formative and summative assessment. One does hear a voice that lecturers are doing the right things, whether trained or not, but this is not sufficiently recognised as it is not 'accredited' and could thus be 'ad hoc'. Implicit here is another call for the standardization of assessment practices, that training is seen in some way to promise. The gap between training and what is needed in practice creates confusion about the role of assessor training in quality assurance.

Different training programmes were on offer (such as the D32). In one interview, different companies with different foci had trained three assessors. A fear was that these different training foci might affect the learner. 'Three guys might assess the same learner and get different outcomes'. These lecturers felt a lack of standardization, despite working with set outcomes for assessors, indicating an inability for unit standards and set assessments to 'standardise'. Their way to deal with it was to talk among themselves about the outcomes. Here then we see an example of an attempt to standardise by shared practice, rather than a turn to bureaucratisation. (where bureaucratisation here is used descriptively, not pejoratively).

Assessor training teaches educators to work with unit standards, but back at the colleges much of the work is with Nated courses and examinations, and hence one cannot assess what the member of staff has learned directly in class, though some can be seen as 'leagues ahead' after training. Some training in the old style assessment, still in wide use, may be advocated.

Some internal 'training' is in evidence in the colleges. One department mentioned mentoring of junior staff, but the extent of this practice is not assessed in this research. The junior person would compile a test that would be moderated by someone with more experience, and would be given time to learn how to set tests.

SHARED PRACTICE

Shared practice emerged in many forms in the interviews: 'I think it is very important for your staff member. We have created this open process of sitting around the table, not with a policeman hat on, to see how each other can improve and learn. We have developed a staff core that want to move, that need to know what is going on at national and provincial level'.

Discussions about whom to turn to for help were seen as valuable. The implication for the provider here is that of fostering the collegiality evident in such practices, as well as providing information to lecturer level currently sent to rectors, information on issues pertaining directly to new forms and requirements of assessment and the quality assurance of assessment including old forms of assessment. Old procedures appear well established and known for established staff. An assessment structure that could influence quality, though in an intangible way, would be a provision for ongoing forums for discussion about assessment.

Moderation processes provide opportunities for shared practice. The subject head on some campuses visits classes, asks students questions, and discusses the student opinion with the lecturer. An open process with staff is gradually developing, despite negative beginnings. On the other hand, shared practice for some was 'moaning mostly', and 'daddy long legs meddling' in assessments of staff, looking at tests, and so on.

Generic assessment

While not all respondents were specifically asked a question about generic assessment, where the discussions did take place, no support for generic assessors was indicated. Rather a strong view was expressed that subject knowledge was needed to be fair to learners.

Several respondents challenged the idea of generic assessment discussed under the section on assessment in the workshops. A minority view that exposure to other areas can enable one to asses across areas was challenged by the dominant view that one must have a knowledge of the discipline, and that learning to assess is superimposed on that

disciplinary knowledge. The latter might be generic but must be based on subject specific knowledge and experience.

Shared practice and mergers

Mergers were viewed positively, partly because they provide educators with an opportunity to share practice, and to benchmark with each other. They can look at weaknesses and strengths. Talking across campuses 'helps with motivation', and can increase accountability, 'The merger was good because there were certain rules that even management had to abide by. It has equalised things more'. But from the perspective of assessment, mergers provide opportunities for a blend of internal and external moderation. Moderation can occur within a college but across campuses. Discussions and interaction with other assessors 'would help'.

Deriving from this, Umalusi could clarify the relationship between internal and external assessment. The purposes of internal assessment are to provide feedback for the learner, and to judge the learners' competence. In addition, internal assessment guides the educator in teaching, and provides a measure of accountability for both learner and educators. External assessment does all the above, but in a less detailed form. In addition it allows for standardization, and for institutional accountability.

RELATIONSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Relationships between the various bodies are complex. For example, from a college perspective, finances count: 'We pay levies to the ETDP SETA, that is for skills training…we have our SDF, we submit our work skills plan and implementation record to the ETDP SETA' and 'If I am comfortable paying their fees, while I am growing they are helping me'. Some SETAs also offer teaching materials to purchase, with a lot of copyrights. To Umalusi, 'we pay our SAFCERT fees'.

Relationships with the department

Many interviewees reported 'no support from national, provincial, from the council'. One rector spoke of being 'in a desert in terms of assessment. Nothing has been coming from the department in terms of guidelines', and consequently he has forged links with SETAs that have in some cases been more supportive. There seems to be 'nothing in place from the department except for national exams'. Most reported very little or no contact with the DoE, and the contact that there is is primarily to do with the national examinations, and is through assessors and moderators.

Umalusi plays a role in moderation, and claims to have a good relationship with the DoE, giving input to examiners, 'If we say the level of the paper is not what is should be, they send it back'.

This perceived lack of contact with the departments by the colleges is not what they desire. Some feel that the colleges have done enough on their own, and now want

guidance and feedback, rather than criticism, 'the message that it's not the right thing and not enough'. Some see themselves hampered only by the department.

The colleges do see the provincial department as their employer, although some people report not being paid, and insecurity in employment because of annual or three monthly contracts, which affects their investment in new practices, and renders them resentful.

Relationship to Department of Labour

One college would like to fall under the DoL as the respondent claims, they 'cannot be worse off', seeing the DoE's performance as 'very poor' on all levels; that it does not fight battles for FET institutions; is 'narrow-minded and bureaucratic and unprofessional in its behaviour towards professionals'. The DoL, to one respondent, has policies that relate to the SETA and work with the demands of the country and province. Colleges should be allowed, claims this respondent, to teach the unit standards and to answer to COSATU, to work with unemployment units, to have access to the unemployed to take onto learnerships and skills courses. But the DoE does not permit this.

This senior respondent sees only a small role (about 40% of courses, for traditional courses), because they do not move with trends and needs. Money can be made from short courses. What seems to be happening here is the need for colleges to generate their own income, and hence prescriptions must include support. One view is that all students would do the unit standards. Umalusi would certificate the fulltime students, but those doing the unit standard route only would be accredited by a SETA logo and college logo via a MoU from Umalusi, thence falling under Umalusi's authority, but also under the SETAs.

Relationship to industry

SETAs have their own requirements for quality assurance, and are constrained by the unit standards. Typically respondents spoke of keeping in touch with industry and especially changes in industry. One view holds that awareness of labour issues is important as labour costs impact on the nature of assessment - if labour becomes too expensive, business will go elsewhere. 'Everybody is shouting outside' that the old systems are not what the market wants; that the market wants more practical work for students, that they be trained in an area to end up with practical skills that are 'market competent'. This is not what Umalusi envisages, rather seeing colleges providing more general qualifications, and not specifically occupationally related qualifications. Umalusi could engage in an advocacy role in negotiating their position with regard to occupationally specific qualifications, which the colleges see as essential to their bread and butter. In 'food' at one college, the college does the fundamentals and communication and 'THETA does everything else'. In this case THETA moderates at the college. One campus sends lecturers to business to see what is needed. Respondents spoke of intending to market courses to industry, such as the skills courses, and requesting sponsorship.

Relationship to industry: tensions between old and new qualifications

Tensions are reported between what industry wants and what the colleges offer in the Nated 191, as industries are accepting the new qualifications, but the colleges' allegiance is officially to the DoE. Some confusion was expressed with regard to adapting Nated and transforming the curricula, 'It does not make sense. We were expecting it to be totally phased out'. One rector spoke of curriculum reform versus transformation. To expect 'ground level' adaptation of 191 was cited by as unfair, because of insufficient capacity at curriculum development level. This was seen to have delayed curricular reform. Another speaks of being stuck with 191, of getting anxious, 'because the qualifications that we produce are just empty papers. Industry tends not to recognise these qualifications', and of the need to resolve this tension 'as quickly as possible'. Another says, 'We create a fantasy and we feed it. Kids won't make it in a global situation'. Such views impinge on the quality assurance of assessment. Umalusi will need to respond to the perception on the ground that industry does not accept the qualifications, and that they are 'empty'? The tension around unit standards, Nated and full subjects is viewed with concern.

Students, it is felt, need a link with industry, for example a secretary would need to link with the public. Practical training where put in place has not traditionally been assessed.

A view that assessors should spend time each year in the industry was expressed by a workshop educator, so as not to be 'in the dark. You can't assess them on things you last worked with 100 years ago'.

The learnerships are viewed as ways to respond to industry, through SETAs, developing curricula in negotiation with the SETAs and businesses. However, some dismay was expressed that colleges cannot get recognition for their initiatives, getting rather 'only programme approval' from the SETA. This means that they cannot market the learnerships on the SETA website. These concerns derive from the principle of 'one provider, one ETQA'.

For a whole qualification, a learner would need to complete summative assessments every few months, and would require guidance in combining unit standards. The elective, generally company specific, includes integrated assessment.

One respondent sees the college sector as having great capacity and resources to offer and assess new courses and broad skills (like computers and communication) that will, in time, generate income. Motivation of educators depends in part on a sense of the relevance of what they are teaching, especially in a 'technological world'.

SETAs have provided different levels of support, and responses to colleges are uneven. To get new courses accredited is a long process that holds them back. SETAs have been accused of favouring businesses, rather than working with the structures that exist.

Relationship with Umalusi

Umalusi is seen to negotiate on behalf of the colleges. In one area of study, the respondent reported that, before Umalusi, accreditation was from the services SETA. The respondent spoke about a 'fight' between Umalusi and a SETA, in this case the Services SETA, about changing the syllabus in hairdressing, which affects students who then can't qualify 'as they are supposed to'. This 'supposed to' implies a notion of the respondent's desires. Frustration leads to negativity in the colleges, lowering quality as some report that they feel that 'nobody cares'.

CARE AND COMMITMENT

A notion of care is emerging as an important consideration in quality assurance. It is probably fostered from the 'top', but can be developed through actions that at least appear as 'care': thoughtfully prepared resources and procedures within good management structures.

The changes in education have already brought in new attitudes of care. Respondents report that learners are treated better, and that staff are giving additional classes to students, though in some cases, students are now made too comfortable, and given the 'red carpet' treatment, different from the lecturers' own training the 'tough' way.

Characteristics of good assessors mentioned were integrity, flexibility, empathy, forthrightness, and a willingness to assess. These are unlikely to develop in a few days of formal training but may develop over time with sustained support, open discussions about assessment and accountability for decisions taken.

OPTIMISM AND DESPAIR AROUND MOUS

Respondents who commented on the lack of clarity about responsibility, anticipated a Memoranda of Understanding between Umalusi and the SETA. The reluctance or refusal on the part of Umalusi to sign MoUs is cited as giving Umalusi a 'bad name'. Some colleges speak optimistically about the MoUs that will be signed, others that Umalusi is preventing learners from getting qualifications. This was the only area in which criticisms of Umalusi were evident, and in some cases pleading. The students would have to get unit standards, and then would have to get 'RPLd' to get the qualification. One view is that SETAs are rivals of Umalusi, and 'badmouthing' has occurred due to perceived animosity about MoUs.

WHAT CAN UMALUSI CONSIDER IN QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ASSESSMENT DERIVING FROM THESE CASE STUDIES?

Practices to continue

The national examination procedures are known and familiar to the interviewees, and perceived by learners and lecturers to be adequately fair, though one-off assessments are a concern should learners have a problem at the time of examination.

Practices to review

The content of the examinations was queried and the emphasis on theory at the expense of practical needs revisiting. This again would fall to the provider, but Umalusi could take an agentive role.

Some believe that the trade test system is irreplaceable, and that those who come out of training now 'are not the same as before'. The Germans have used the trade system for 1500 years and hence it is tried and can be trusted'.

Through some international benchmarking and exchange, confidence could be developed in qualifications offered. Umalusi would support the notion of international benchmarking, 'to maintain standards at an acceptable level', as well as to keep Umalusi 'on its toes', setting parameters.

Practices to continue

Practices that Umalusi has in place, such as standardization workshops could continue to develop knowledge of others' work through shared practice.

Also ongoing seeking of information about practices and problems would be useful to identify areas for development or intervention.

Observations regarding the discourse of quality assurance

Many interviewees have been influenced by commercial and industrial approaches to quality assurance. Some speak of students as clients and customers, as well as who they serve in the sector as clients and customers, ' also as a service provider to make sure that the clients and customers benefit form the service that we are offering. I also ask myself, why …does a student want to be in your class and not in my class?'

CHALLENGES

There is a need for a debate about what constitutes 'quality' of outcomes for the college sector, and for the formation of some working definitions.

There is a need to advocate consideration of the funding issues for the college, and employability of learners. A concern for lecturers, especially in the technical fields, is the global competition in relation to demands on conditions of employment. The workplace

features continually in their thinking, given in comments such as, 'With such a large informal sector here and sweatshops abroad, the industry could be in crisis'. This, the respondent reports impacts on assessment as it 'boils down to labour'.

Umalusi could guide the colleges as to what to prioritise for quality assurance of assessment in the next 3-5 years.

What is the relationship between quality and context?

Issues such as this are broader than the study, but emerge from the data. One campus rector asked that the learners' context must be taken into account, but could not identify what this might mean for quality assurance of assessment. Perhaps this implies acceptance, albeit temporary of mismatches with the chosen benchmarks.

What counts as good and sufficient evidence?

More than one respondent 'warned' that assessment must not take over. The facilitation of knowledge is 'much more important' than the assessment process. Assessment must keep its place. Umalusi could take such a consideration into account in liaising with the provider around assessment demands.

Whose responsibilities are what in the immediate future?

Ethics and conflicts of interest

Umalusi could have a watchful eye over practices such as examiners producing textbooks on the examinations, and of the SETAs both writing materials and quality assuring. Such practices, and the practices around new qualifications and assessor training are questioned by some, 'The purpose is job creation and equity, but consultants are lining their pockets.'

Umalusi has elected to take a role in questioning the bigger picture around quality assurance of assessment, in interrogating the distribution of resources to teaching development, materials development, assessment, management reviews and so on. This approach would be consonant with a view of quality assurance working through the line functions, not on the level of 'buying a system', or of a bureaucratic system of quality assurance.

IN CONCLUSION

While judgement constitutes assessment practices, judgements without justification can appear spurious and unfair. It behoves the assessor, moderator, and verifier to justify their assessments, by documenting their decisions, and providing evidence for these. This permits other assessors to respectively judge the validity of the judgement. While this is in no way a perfect process, and complete impartiality unlikely, it may in some way hold

those responsible for a role in the quality assurance of assessment accountable through a possible interrogation of their decisions.

Often, irregularities are only brought to light if there are known avenues, and equitable power relations. What is invoked here is a need to ensure that learners, assessors, moderators, and verifiers know the importance of justifying decisions, using criteria where appropriate, and at least, trying to make decisions explicit, though the judgements do derive from experience and implicit practice, and cannot be made explicit in their entirety..

Each assessor or lecturer should be encouraged to keep an assessment portfolio, in which both typical, excellent and difficult cases are kept and interpreted, with criteria for decisions made explicit. These can be used reflectively, and formatively, or for shared practice and standardization, as well as for developing a bank of criteria, often implicit in experience. Moderators and verifiers may benefit from keeping a portfolio. A portfolio for each role could be an accountable way forward as a record of interpreted evidence.

In summary, certain issues have permeated all the sections, in particular, standardization, and to some extent equivalence. For the quality assurance of assessment, educators are required to show their competence to assess. This we have argued, can be done through management functions. But understandings of what needs to be put in place, can be externally required and internally driven. This would require support and accountability at the highest level. Educators will need more than information. Umalusi could continue to provide colleges with information pertinent to assessment practices, information that reaches the lecturers. On the other hand, information can be filtered down through a series of requirements, phased in, and supported, with accountability through line function, right up to and beyond the rector. But time and capacity do have to be considered, for the ideals of assessment are not likely to be sustainable if taken to scale

If exit outcomes and 'quality' of learners is accepted as part of the quality assurance of assessment, rather than a verification of procedures, and if the suggestion of working through line functions in the quality assurance of assessment is accepted, Umalusi would need some advocacy role in the support of management in the providers, via perhaps the Department of Education, at least in the short term. The willingness in the colleges is evident, though capacity will need to be developed. One quality officer says that the merged college, 'is very blessed by willingness and respect', believing that other capacities can be developed.

Thus we advocate that rather than introducing expensive new 'structures' or '*total* quality management systems', colleges make existing procedures more effective for purpose, and build on these.

6. PUBLIC FET COLLEGE QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire about assessment and quality assurance of assessment was sent to campus heads of all the 52 colleges on the AFETISA list, by Umalusi and later to those with email addresses by the researchers. Campus heads were asked to respond to the questionnaire, as well as to give it to lecturers in three different departments. 66 questionnaires were returned.

TERMINOLOGY

Many lecturers use the term 'student'. New policy uses the term 'learner'. In this research we interchange the terms.

PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

The questionnaire consisted of 37 statements relating to assessment, quality assurance, and related matters. Respondents were given the option of choosing between 'no', 'yes', 'sometimes', 'does not apply'. Respondents were provided with space for comments on each statement. In most cases there were few respondents who chose 'does not apply', and few who did not respond specifically to the statements. The numbers of responses for each category are given after the heading denoting the statement being dealt with. The document provides an analysis of lecturers' responses according to the main assertions in the questionnaire; we have at times grouped questions and the comments received are discussed under the relevant grouping. Respondents were also provided with space to raise any other issues, and this is dealt with last in the document.

Most of the respondents did not indicate (as they were required to) the field in which they work, as well as the level at which they work. Most of the completed questionnaires were received through email. We elected to integrate rather than disaggregate the information received by college, except where this was obviously necessary and possible, as the aim of the questionnaires was to get a broad overview of practice. Information about a distance institution is pointed out separately where necessary, as there are clearly inherent differences with their approach.

We have made no assumptions as to who responded to the questionnaires.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

The following are some general impressions, based on the 63 returned questionnaires. We make no attempt to generalise across colleges from these, but to paint a picture of the range of practices elicited from the responses:

- The responses indicate a positive spirit amongst technical college lecturers; practitioners who are applying their minds to systems of assessment and quality assurance of assessment.

- Fairly consistent quality assurance processes are claimed to be in place in many of the colleges. Lecturers work with subject heads and heads of department, who moderate assessments, and discuss and compare results.

- Many lecturers have been trained in assessment, and are aware of new terminology in assessment and quality assurance. From a questionnaire of this nature, one cannot evaluate whether or not this has improved practice, although at times respondents give very practical and detailed answers, which indicate engagement at the level of practice. Comments do indicate lecturers' sense of the new requirements, and there was a fairly high degree of honesty and critical reflection in the answering of the questionnaires.

- The issue of assessor training is a complicated one. In general there was a positive response to it, and it was seen as having injected life into the institutions in some instances, in particular, of critical reflection on assessment. However, we feel that caution should be exercised in drawing strong conclusions from this. There are a range of reasons why lecturers could have enjoyed the training; establishing whether such an intervention has in fact improved practice would need far more detailed research than is possible in the current project.

- There is a sense from many of the institutions of waiting for immanent change; that things will be different when the new system starts to kick in. There is generally a positive attitude towards change and the new system. However, at the same time, there is a sense of confusion and insecurity in some quarters, and a sense that institutions don't know what is being required of them. There is also a definite sense of difference between assessment/moderation practice and requirements in the DoE/Nated Courses and those in learnerships/new programmes.

- The trimester system was generally seen as a problem from the point of view of time for rigorous assessment and feedback to students.

- There seems to be a general desire to have closer links with industry, to teach more practical and applied courses, and to move away from theory.

COLLATED INFORMATION BY QUESTIONNAIRE STATEMENT

Questionnaire statements 1-3 form a group. Responses will be collated.

Questionnaire statement 1

We only use written tests or examinations in assessment.

Numbers of responses

No: 43
Yes: 13
Sometimes: 3
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 3

Questionnaire statement 2

We use a combination of methods of assessment

This statement is related to the previous one, and was included partly to verify responses to the first.

Numbers of responses

No: 9
Yes: 51
Sometimes: 1
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 2

Questionnaire statement 3

We assess our students' practical work.

Numbers of responses

No: 1
Yes: 58
Sometimes: 2
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

As indicated by the numbers, assessment at these colleges is broader than written exams. However, from the comments it became clear that this refers mainly to practicals. A typical comment was, 'National exams are written; practicals continue during the term.' Some strong feelings were expressed about the need for practical assessment, such as, 'Must be able to perform task and adapt/perform in other situations—test not enough'.

There was a strong 'yes' choice for the statement that practical work is assessed. Some institutions even claimed to only assess 'vocational and technical' work. Practical assessment contributes to 60% of year marks in some subjects.

There was a general sense that there was a move towards more practical courses, and that the assessment of practical work will become more and more important. Practical assessment was seen to be important as it enabled the lecturer, 'to observe ability to do the job.' However, respondents seem to have different understandings of what is practical. Some respondents were confused about the weighting of theory and practical assessment. The claim for the importance of assessing practicals pertains to respondents' views of endpoint competence.

Various respondents claimed that there is practical evaluation in a range of subjects, such as Marketing Management, Educare, Footware, and Funeral Studies, and the area of hair care is said to have a large practical component. A respondent in the hospitality sector uses practical demonstration, and pictures are taken. Various respondents in computer studies reported that practical work is done regularly (in some cases, every day), and is filed in a portfolio. In some colleges, students learning computer studies are assessed in a variety of practical manners, though in others, learners only do written tests. Most computer lecturers reported that each learner has to be competent on a computer, and has to produce a written copy of what they have done, testing the product. Respondents from the computer sector stressed that exams should not be the main method of assessment: 'Some principles can only be tested by demonstration'. In engineering studies there are institutional constraints because of insufficient equipment and resources.

The point was made that Skills Centres and workshops, particularly in engineering, use mostly practical competence assessment. There was also a sense from a few respondents that their workshops are new, and once they are functioning, practical work will be assessed more systematically. From the case studies, it appears that numbers in these workshops may be small.

Many of the respondents indicated awareness of other types of assessment, as seen from the comment, 'There are many other assessment instruments or tools'. This may be related to the fact that many college lecturers have been on assessor training.

Most respondents claim to use a combination of methods of assessment, justifying their opinions, in statements such as: 'No one method can be effectively used in assessment';

'Courses lend themselves to a variety of ways of assessing'; and 'We use a combination of methods of assessment. It is effective.' Methods such as structured interviews, behavioural observations, assignments, and presentations are said to be used, with observations being mentioned the most frequently. Some respondents mentioned group assessments and group work in class, but did not specify the methodology used.

One respondent said that since going on assessor training, people wish to try out different methods of assessment, although in certain subjects the 11 week curriculum does not give them enough time. Those that only use tests say it is mainly because of time limits.

Some respondents claimed that practicals, orals, assignments, and observations are all used. Two 'General, Utility, and Tourism' lecturers said that group work and interviews are incorporated into their subjects. A business studies respondent reported the use of role plays and oral assessments. One respondent claimed that there is self-assessment, final assessment, peer assessment, and lecturer assessment of practical work.

In those colleges/programmes which were based on the newly registered NQF qualifications, respondents commented that no exams were written; learners were evaluated as competent or not competent against the unit standard.

General points about the need for different forms of assessment, such as, 'It is necessary to ensure sufficient evidence' were made. However, it is not clear whether this relates to what practitioners think they should be doing, or what they are actually doing.

One respondent explained a 'sometimes' reply by saying 'Not fully outcomes-based yet'. Another claimed to test practical skills, theory, and attitude.

Questionnaire statement 4

We have a system of continuous assessment.

Numbers of responses

No: 5
Yes: 55
Sometimes: 1
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

The numbers again show a majority of respondents claiming that continuous assessment does take place, although a few respondents stated that in some campuses it is not 'continuous or compulsory.' There is also a sense that this will start happening with the new system.

Many of the respondents seemed to equate continuous assessment with a series of tests (two tests, internal and external exam). Tests results throughout the trimesters are compiled into a 'term mark'. Some respondents stated that all worksheets and tests count for year marks, and one said this will maintain 'a culture of learning on campus'. Some respondents mentioned assignments and projects. Another said they do 'an assessment' after each 'section'.

There was, from some respondents, a sense that lecturers are continually monitoring learners and providing informal feedback. Particularly in the workshops, respondents claimed that, 'Assessment takes place all the time while students are busy with practicals.' This was described as a process of continuous formative assessment, with feedback, until such a time that the student is deemed competent. In computer studies practical tests contribute to term marks: 'Progress is checked through out training.'

Questionnaire statement 5

Discussion for questions 5 and 6 are grouped as they both deal with formative and summative assessment

We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback only.

Numbers of responses

No: 36
Yes: 9
Sometimes: 13
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 4

Questionnaire statement 6

We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback, but we also record their marks to use for promotion.

Numbers of responses

No: 0
Yes: 55
Sometimes: 2
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

What we were trying to establish with this question is whether students are assessed in ways which do not count towards their term mark. This can be important as an educational practice as it enables students to take risks. The low number of 'yes' choices shows that most respondents do not include assessments which are only for the purpose of feedback, and we inferred that most respondents did understand the nuance in this question. In most cases, while learners do get some sort of feedback, at least in the form of a mark, assessment results are recorded and accumulate toward the summative mark, as is seen by the comment, 'Not only for feedback but also for building year mark' or 'Assignments count towards a term mark'. One respondent said that learners also get feedback on summative assessment; in other words, the fact that learners got feedback was the overriding concern. One respondent stated that marks themselves are formative.

Some respondents simply claimed to assess both formatively and summatively, the former for feedback: 'We assess students formatively for feedback and summatively for giving promotion' and use the feedback for assisting learners through: 'Feedback plus help'. There were also general statements about the importance of formative assessment for both teaching and accountability, 'to establish whether lesson material has been conveyed effectively, to evaluate the facilitator'.

Some respondents stated that there is not always time for formative feedback; this was particularly seen as a problem in the trimester courses. In the year courses there is some assessment for formative purposes only, according to a few respondents. One respondent stated that learnerships are assessed formatively, but full time courses are not. This was confirmed by another respondent who stated, 'Learners are registered at the Theta. No marks required.'

Overall there was a sense from the comments that assessment was integral to learning, but that the summative and formative aspects of assessment were not separate.

There were general statements about practice and policy, such as 'We have to record all marks because of the system of year marks that form part of the qualification.' There were also responses which could reflect respondents trying to state the 'correct' answer, or could reflect that they are implementing policy, such as 'Assessment is necessary for promotion—OBE'. Some respondents keep marks only because they have to be submitted. In general respondents are keeping marks, except for some in the workshops.

The learners registered on Theta hospitality learnerships are evaluated as competent or not competent against the unit standards; some respondents keep marks during the term because they don't know how else to record competence, but send in to Theta a simple statement of 'competent' or 'not yet competent'. One of the respondents described this as marks counting 'indirectly', another said that marks are used as a guideline for deciding whether or not competency has been achieved. While lecturers are officially using the new system, in their daily practice they rely on what they are used to doing. In our view

ETQAs should seriously consider the implications of doing away with marks, both in terms of the difficulties it will cause for lecturers in their daily practice, and also in terms of whether or not it will in fact have the 'transformatory' effect that is desired, but that 'marks' need to be seen as indicators, rather than as tangible and absolute objects.

Questionnaire statement 7

Term marks count for the final mark (if yes, please say how much they count.)

Numbers of responses

No: 5
Yes: 50
Sometimes: 0
Does not apply: 5
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

In the Nated courses the general picture is that the year mark counts 40% and the external exam counts for 60%, although two respondents said it is 50/50. It differs for theory and practical courses, and the ratio is prescribed by the DoE. One said 'The department uses a computerised formula which does the calculation automatically.' There are subject differences: 'Hairdressing has a 70/30 count'

There was some confusion about this issue, as can be seen from the following response: 'Not too sure whether the 60% 40% still applies.' There was some confusion about unit standards, and term marks. 'Each terms marks count. Unless a learner only complete part of a unit standard.' Another said 'Not yet, because DoE do not approve unit standards yet.'

Questionnaire statement 8

We give only marks on assessment.

Numbers of responses

No: 35
Yes: 22
Sometimes: 22
Does not apply:
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

It is interesting that there is a fairly significant difference in the numbers of yes/no choices to those in statement 6. According to choices on this statement, 22 respondents give only marks, while according to the choices for statement 6, nearly all lecturers provide feedback. This indicates that marks are seen as feedback, and questions may need to distinguish between types of feedback, which the following question attempts.

There were few comments on this statement, but those who did comment stated that feedback is given, and in some cases, followed by action. One stated 'Guidance is part of feedback to ensure improvement '. A respondent in the Tourism sector claimed to discuss the evaluation of work placement with students. A respondent from a Skills Centres said that learners' practical marks are discussed, and errors are pointed out, but it is still very informal. One said that 'verbal feedback is given to reinforce', while another stated simply, 'Written/discussion/personal'. One respondent said that they 'write down reasons why competent and not competent yet, and discuss with learners.'

Some respondents stated that learners are only told whether they are competent or not yet competent.

The fact that marks are given to prepare students for assessment, but that they are only given competent/not competent finally, re-emerged in this section.

One respondent interpreted the statement differently: 'Marks are also allocated for attendance.'

Questionnaire statement 9

We give many types of feedback on assessment.

Numbers of responses

No: 3
Yes: 48
Sometimes: 8
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

The responses confirm the general trend.

Various respondents provided some detail about how feedback is given, which is an indication that it is in fact given. Comments included statements such as 'On the board as well as on the scripts', and 'Mostly marks, sometimes verbal and/or demonstration by instructor.' Class feedback/oral feedback and written explanations are fairly common,

while the notion of providing learners with a memo and working out problems on the board was referred to by quite a few respondents. One respondent in the field of computers stated that 'learners go over step by step on their own computers.' A few respondents stated that learners are assisted with problems. One said that feedback is given individually as well as in groups, and students redo the work, after which they are given feedback again. Some respondents said that feedback includes parent meetings and personal student meetings. Another stated that 'Depending on the course, tourism discusses evaluation of workplaces and practical marks with them.'

As was seen above, some respondents felt that marks are formative assessment: 'just marks as indicated on the memorandum, or practical marks as on the checklist'.

There was some sense of a developmental imperative: 'Verbal and written. Recap, guide'; 'suggestions for improvement.'; and 'Students are guided through every assessment, constant feedback.'

Professional judgement was referred to: 'As lecturers see fit for specific scenarios'. One respondent also stated that 'it is necessary to hear learner voices as well.'

Questionnaire statement 10

We meet our students to discuss assessments.

Numbers of responses

No: 11
Yes: 31
Sometimes: 18
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

Many respondents stated that learners are met in a group, not individually; class contact time was seen as sufficient for meeting with learners. Some felt that there was time for individual discussions in class. Much of this discussion was related to tests being handed back, although some respondents stated that it 'depends on the instruments used for assessment.' Some stated that there would be meetings with individuals only when needed, or when there is a specific problem.

Some felt that feedback on an individual basis was sufficient. Some stated that learners are met two days before assessment to prepare them.

The following quote indicates fairly extensive assessment contact with learners: 'In some subjects we offer workshops on Saturdays and the students who attend get more feedback. In Educare students have to attend an orientation session on Saturdays to

discuss assessment. In funeral studies we meet with the individual student and the industry mentor to discuss the assessment. In Footware we have an industry assessor who evaluates students.'

Some responses gave reasons for meeting with students, such as meeting to identify weaknesses and strengths, or preparing learners for assessment: 'To discuss and agree on the work to be assessed.'

There is a sense of new practice being introduced, and not yet having been fully implemented: 'In some fields like tourism this is the ideal, and as people start introducing different assessment ways this becomes an integral part of assessment. We tried to introduce a mentor system where staff members would call students in for tutorials to discuss problems and assessments but this was not successful at that stage. As soon as we have more flexibility on campus with regards to assessment….'

There was a feeling from a few respondents that they are constrained by time; this particularly applied to those in the trimester system. There was also a sense that there is inflexibility in the system, and that this will change. There was a belief expressed that in the new system there will be a move towards more interaction with students. However, this seems to be based on respondents' understanding of the new policy requirements, without a sense of whether funding and student ratios will in fact allow this to happen.

Questionnaire statement 11

Our students assess themselves.

Numbers of responses

No: 15
Yes: 21
Sometimes: 22
Does not apply: 2
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

There were few concrete examples given to back up the 21 and 22 respondents that chose 'yes' and 'sometimes' respectively. One stated that 'Self assessment sheets are used'; and another that 'Self assessment activities at the ends of modules in some subjects'.

There were varying interpretations of what this could mean; 'In the sense that they must give own opinion on assessment' and 'Students assess their work before giving it in for lecturers for assessment'. Comments such as 'Supply memo which they can use to assess themselves' imply that self-assessment is purely non-formal. Another stated, 'They are encouraged to assess themselves but no official structure in place.' There was some sense of 'marking their own assignments', or learners assessing class work.

There was some sense that self-assessment would vary depending on the type of assessment; role play was seen by some as lending itself to self-assessment (it is not clear why). Some stated that it would depend on work content and teaching mode.

There seemed to be a sense here that self -assessment was anticipated but not necessarily taking place; 'Part of new assessment structure'. There were also comments such as 'not yet'; and 'We realise that it will play a bigger role in future'; indicating a belief in a future move in this direction.

Questionnaire statement 12

Our students assess each other.

Numbers of responses

No: 20
Yes: 16
Sometimes: 22
Does not apply: 2
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

Again, there were few concrete examples of practice. It would seem that peer assessment is unusual, even at an informal level. The following few were picked up: 'Marking each other's assignments' and 'peer assessment sheets are used'. There was a sense that orals and practicals are appropriate for peer evaluation: 'In language course for instance with orals and in practicals for instance in tourism'.

Most comments were fairly vague, such as 'learner-learner and group-group' and 'Use peer assessment where applicable'. 'Students assess each other in groups'.

Again, peer evaluation was felt to be something which should/will be happening: 'Part of new assessment structure'. In the case of a distance education institution, peer assessment would have to be differently considered.

Some respondents articulated values associated with peer assessment, such as, 'As peers they assess each other and evaluate where they went wrong thus promoting team work.' Of concern is how peer assessment could lay learners open to abuse. One enthusiastic respondent wrote, 'Our students assess each other not only subject related but also personality wise and attitude wise.' We feel that this highlights some of the problems with assessing 'values and attitudes' which we will discuss later.

Questionnaire statement 13

We assess mainly facts or content.

Numbers of responses

No: 35
Yes: 17
Sometimes: 8
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 2

Comment and analysis

Some respondents claimed that their campuses tested 100% content, and some 100% practical skills, while others stated 'We assess the learner in totality'. Practices are highly variable.

It clearly depends on the instructional offering; some areas (such as business studies and accounting) are felt to be more suited for exams, whereas skills like speed are important in computers. Various responses alluded to application: 'Also interpretation and whether the knowledge can be applied' and 'Must have underpinning knowledge and understanding. Must be able to do and do in different situations/different circumstances.' One respondent stated that members of staff with industry knowledge are particularly useful in terms of applied knowledge. Some stated that they include skills and attitudes, and one claimed 'I will take every relevant aspect into consideration. Telephone technique, body language, voice, and manner'. Another stated that 'Assessment is also practical and also on life skills etc.'

Responses to this question brought into question how the notion of 'content' is understood. For example, the following comment: 'depending on the contents of the subject; facts and content form the basis of the practical. Theory must be applied in practical' appears to see theory, content and facts as the same, and different from, though underpinning practical work.

There was a sense of a need to conform to policy requirements: 'According to the outcomes of the unit standards' and 'Everything in unit standards outcomes are assessed; theory, practical and skill.'

Questionnaire statement 14

We assess content and skills

Numbers of responses

No: 5
Yes: 43

Sometimes: 8
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 6

Comments and analysis

This statement evoked most detailed comments in terms of numerical break down of learner marks, as the questionnaire asked for an approximate proportion of assessment of skills and content, based on an assumption of a dichotomy in the way these are thought of in practice. This is perhaps also because it is an area on which there is a concrete policy, and respondents felt confident in stating the policy. It should be noted in this regard that the ratios we received at times contradicted each other; this could indicate varying policies across colleges or confusion about policy. One respondent referred us to 'the policy' without indicating what policy. .

We have listed most of the breakdowns received, except for those which did not mention subject areas, and which had not filled in subject areas in the appropriate point of the questionnaire.

Some respondents seemed to be giving formally required breakdowns:

- 'Hospitality 80% skill 20% theory. Art 67% skill 33% theory. Computers 80% skill 20% theory. Business studies 20% skill 80% theory.'
- 'Business Studies 50% content 50% skills'
- 'Engineering 60% content 40% skills'
- 'Workshops and lab 90% skills 10% content'.
- 'Business Studies 30% skills based'
- 'Footware 70, funeral services 80,languages 80' (the numbers here presumably refer to skills)
- 'communication 20% (skills)'.
- '70% skills in learnerships'
- 'Comp prac and info proc 20% skills'
- 'Office practice and sales management 30% skills and 70% content. Computer practice 70% skills and 30% content.'

Others seemed to be estimating a breakdown between content and skills; for example, two respondents stated that it was '50/50'; this could be read as a general statement of intent rather than a specific policy. Another said '+-70% according to the unit standards; another estimated that the unit standards are about 80% based on skills. This probably indicates that they are estimating the amount of practical or skills based learning in different areas. Similarly, one respondent claimed that their assessment is based on '70% measuring, calculating information, solving problems, analyse information.'

Some (particularly in workshops) stated that they assess 100% on skills..

One respondent stated that in shorter informal courses it depends on what industry expects of a learner: 'We adapt to industry needs. For instance, safety regulations make up a proportion of workshop training. This is normally theory that is very important for a specific industry'. Here the theory is needed before proceeding in the practical, for safety reasons. Some interpreted skills as the practical application of knowledge or content.

Questionnaire statement 15

We test values and attitudes

Numbers of responses

No: 16
Yes: 27
Sometimes: 15
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

A few respondents provided reasons for assessing values, such as 'to develop the learner as a whole' and 'To establish the outlook on business environment. To bring values attitudes and business attitudes together'.

Others attempted to describe how values are assessed. One said that they use a 'reflexive questionnaire'. Another stated 'Efforts and or guidance is made to address negative attitudes. Positive attitudes are encouraged and reinforced'. One saw class attendance as a way of assessing attitudes. Assessing the critical cross field outcomes in the learnerships was indicated as a way in which values are tested.

A few respondents indicated that this is not 'yet' done, and something that will have to be done soon: 'As we are still using the old syllabi, this is not done. But we are working towards re-aligning our syllabi to be able to test values and attitudes'.

Some said that values and attitudes are focused on, but not tested in a formal way.'

Questionnaire statement 16

We discuss the assessments we set with our colleagues before the learners write.

Numbers of responses

No: 14
Yes: 29
Sometimes: 16
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

There was a sense of the importance of building shared practice in the comments on this statement. One respondent stated that that they discuss assessments 'to clarify one another on certain issues.'

In the main, there seemed to be a practice of working within subject committees, and through heads of department: 'Subject meetings to be held at least once a term. Assessments moderated by subject heads and feedback to lecturers' and 'We work with a system of subject heads and all assessments have to be moderated.' 'During subject and faculty meetings.' 'Subject heads controls all assessments.' 'Per subject in specific department.'

Some responses were quite specific: 'Our tourism department has a meeting on Wednesday for about 45 minutes in which we discuss any marks, assignments set, and students'. The specificity here seemed to be describing real practice; on the other hand a comment such as 'staff meetings' could imply that little meaningful discussion takes place. There was also a sense of discussion during marking: 'One lecturer sets a paper for the whole group. All lecturers mark according to a memo and discuss problems with other lecturers.'

Assessments seemed only really to be discussed if they were large, such as internal exams or mid-term exams. With unit standards, discussion on assessment may decrease - 'because of the number of unit standards involved, not possible to discuss everything'

While the question asked for collegial discussion about assessments, comments pertained also to the system of moderation. Three respondents referred to the fact that there is a 'Moderation system in place. Part of internal quality assurance system'. This was specifically in reference to the FoodBev SETA and Theta. Another commented on the moderation of assessments in full time courses. However, this did not necessarily mean that there was collegial discussion about assessment, except for one respondent who wrote, 'Discuss with moderators as well'.

Two respondents said that assessment is not discussed because it is 'not general policy' and 'there is no official structure in place'.

Few thought to give reasons for discussing assessment with each other; one stated, 'To be able to give students uniform assessment', indicating a concern with standardization.

Questionnaire statement 17

We do assessments set by an outside assessment body only.

Numbers of responses

No: 37
Yes: 7
Sometimes: 9
Does not apply: 4
No reply: 6

Comments and analysis

External examinations mentioned fell under the National Department of Education, which were summative. There was a strong indication that while final assessment or exams are done externally, there was a range of internal assessments as well. Some added that the external exam counted for 60% of the promotion mark, and that external exams only took place once a se/trimester. Others stressed that there are 'Also internal exams, tests, and assignments' and that 'formative assessment for the purpose of compiling semester marks are done by ourselves'. Another stated that 'We assess internally also. We are planning to train moderators. We are in the process of preparing ourselves for a changed method of assessing that will be in line with NQF and SAQA'.

Some stated that, on the contrary, 'no assessment' was available from an outside body for new courses. Linked to this was a notion of the 'External quality assurance part of Theta requirements', instead of an external exam. [discuss this with the Theta]. In some cases mention was made of external moderation of internally run assessments, 'We have an external moderator who receives about 25% of the tourism classes work in the different subjects, which she moderates and sends to us and the DoE'.

Questionnaire statement 18

The assessors or those who are testing or marking the students discuss the tests and the way they are marking with each other.

Numbers of responses

No: 6
Yes 43:
Sometimes: 10
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

There was a clear sense from some of discussing prior to and during marking, and a sense of shared practice. Some respondents stated that this took place formally, such as during subject meetings, and some, informally.

Some have a discussion on the memorandum before marking. Others felt that having a memorandum obviated the need for discussions about marking.

Some respondents felt that regular moderation and clear guidelines were sufficient and would standardise practice: 'we try to keep memorandums when we mark. We have clear guidelines. We have moderators from our main campus who visit all the skills centres to look at practical outcomes of students. We are aiming at setting the same standards throughout our organisation.' The purpose of discussing marking was seen by one respondent to be to 'set a uniform standard in college'; another simply stated that it was 'part of quality system'.

Some mentioned that in the external examination process marking was done collectively in panels, and that there was discussion; we are not sure whether this implies that the same does not take place internally. Some, however, claimed to meet on a weekly basis and discuss assessment. One respondent mentioned that they discuss promotion marks before compiling a year mark.

One respondent felt that discussion cannot take place because 'there is no official structure in place.'

Questionnaire statement 19

We identify students who may fail through an early assessment.

Numbers of responses

No: 2
Yes: 46
Sometimes: 7
Does not apply: 3
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

Few respondents gave examples of how such identification might take place. One stated that continuous assessment allows for early detection, while others mentioned 'controlled tests'; 'English proficiency tests'; and internal exams. One respondent mentioned aptitude tests and a 'first month test.'

There were many more responses on what action is taken after 'at risk' learners have been identified, although most of them were very general, such as 'They are encouraged to work harder.' Some stated that they involve parents and guardians, and others that they deal with the potential problem through weekly tutorial classes; another mentioned the provision of extra sessions and individual attention in class. One respondent mentioned that their institution provides free ABET classes to assist learners with basic skills. Some gave structural solutions—'Student support division in place'; and 'Students with

learning problems are referred to the life skills committee.' We are obviously not in a position to know whether such references to structures are a way of deferring the problem, or whether they provide a genuine solution.

A generally concerned feeling is well captured in the following comment: 'When we identify students with problems in class, we speak to them to find out what the problems are. If students need extra help, staff will assist them in class. We are planning to do more towards remedial support for students.'

Distance institutions may have specific problems in this regard, as often there are only two assignments required, and often the learners submit them both together. Even if the first assignment arrives on time, and they give feedback, they have no contact with the learners, and have to wait for the second assignment to see if they have improved.

Questionnaire statement 20

We provide support for 'at risk' students.

Numbers of responses

No: 3
Yes: 39
Sometimes: 13
Does not apply: 3
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

Following from the comments on statement 19, various respondents listed ways in which learners were supported. The approaches include: weekly tutorials; guidance and counselling; lecturer and peer support; life skills committees; remedial classes; students' support systems or divisions; extra classes; 'open' periods in which learners can approach staff for support; extra exercises; more individual attention; and additional assessment. One respondent mentioned that they might adjust the course; i.e. do fewer unit standards, if learners were not coping. Another mentioned that they group students according to fast and slow learners.

Some said that they could not provide additional support for students at risk, because they 'do not have enough staff and would like to appoint a student support officer'; another reported having a three year plan for student support which had not yet been implemented. Time was cited as a factor influencing support; it could only be provided if there was time to support. There was some sense of frustration in this regard: 'We give individual feedback to each student and try to assist them where they struggle. But they don't have time to repeat an assignment especially in Engineering studies as the block is too short.'

Questionnaire statement 21

We help students prepare for their assessments.

Numbers of responses

No: 1
Yes: 54
Sometimes: 4
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

Some respondents indicated that they try to assist learners to prepare specifically for their assessments by, for example, informing them of the methods that will be used, giving clear instructions about the content of the assessment, and making sure 'they understand exactly what to expect.' Others indicated that they would assist learners to practice specific skills prior to being assessed, and some mentioned revision, and extra notes. Yet others assisted learners to work through old question papers to prepare for the final exams.

Some respondents saw the normal process of class teaching as sufficient preparation; others that internal assessment in the colleges was part of the preparation for the external exam. 'All work is practical and learners are prepared in class' and 'We provide the study materials hoping we will have covered the content sufficiently'.

An interesting distinction was made between 'Revision for full time courses and pre-assessment meeting for learnerships.' The pre-assessment meeting for learnerships will be discussed under the case studies.

Questionnaire statement 22

We talk about whether our assessments test what we want them to test.

Numbers of responses

No: 8
Yes: 41
Sometimes: 6
Does not apply: 3
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

Some respondents said that this was a normal part of subject and faculty meetings; others said that discussions take place in marking teams, as well as with students and

moderators. There was a sense expressed by some respondents of continuous alignment of assessments with new requirements. One stated that they 'Work according to assessment criteria'; another mentioned 'unit standards'. It appears as if the perception here is that because assessment criteria are stipulated, there is no need for professional discussion about assessment. Others however, claimed a concern with authenticity, 'In the workshops there is every effort made to make assessment relevant.'

One said that discussion does not take place, due to the informal nature of assessments, and another because 'there is no official structure in place'.

Questionnaire statement 23

We have a process of internal moderation of assessments before the learners get them.

Numbers of responses

No: 16
Yes: 35
Sometimes: 5
Does not apply: 2
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

There seems to be varying practice in this regard, from one respondent, who stated the following: 'Yes we are very strict when it comes to moderation. Subject heads hold regular meetings in their subject fields to standardise quality of training and to pick up possible problems in their field. We have also created opportunities for the new campuses staff to visit the main site and for subject heads to visit the new sites to standardise quality' to another who simply said that there is no official structure in place.

The general practice seems to be that academic heads or subject heads moderate question papers. Some stated that this happens for external exams, but not for class and semester tests. One stated that moderation of assessment tasks particularly takes place with practical subjects.

Questionnaire statement 24

We have a process of internal moderation of the marking itself.

Numbers of responses

No: 13
Yes: 34
Sometimes: 12

Does not apply: 0
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

Responses were similar as for statement 23. Generally, some respondents claimed that there is internal moderation of marking on subjects marked internally; specifically for internal exams. One explained that 'we make sure that all lecturers mark exactly the same, do the same tests, work to the same work schedule.' As for statement 18 above, some felt that the existence of a memorandum obviated the need for internal moderation of marking; 'We mark according to the same memo which is very exact'. One stated that a senior lecturer and subject specialist moderate 10% of each group. There was a sense from some that internal moderation mainly took place in full time courses, and would soon be introduced in learnerships.

Questionnaire statement 25

We have a process of internal moderation of marks or assessment results.

Numbers of responses

No: 10
Yes: 42
Sometimes: 6
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

The main reason for this was seen to be getting a general sense of learners' progress; this is illustrated with the following comment 'We compare marks to previous semesters and trimesters. If we find a deviation we investigate. We always compare marks with national statistics'. Some stated that only examination papers were moderated. A few respondents mentioned 'year mark meetings'. One stated, as in the section above, that there was internal moderation of marks or results for full time courses, but not yet for learnerships.

No respondents mentioned how internal moderation of marks is done, or what exactly they meant by it. In this light it is difficult to evaluate exactly what the strong 'yes' choice actually means, though we infer from question 26, that it refers to discussion of results.

Questionnaire statement 26

We analyse learner marks as a group.

Numbers of responses

No: 15
Yes: 35
Sometimes: 6
Does not apply: 2
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

This relates to statement 25 above, and it seems as if, when respondents spoke about internally moderating learners' marks, what they were really referring to is process of discussing learners' marks. Various respondents mentioned discussing full time classes' year marks, in order to finalise them; as well as analysing learners' marks as a group. One stated that they 'do averages, maximum and minimum. Group marks are also compared to other institutions and national marks'. Another mentioned that lecturers discuss the competency of groups as a whole, and compare across subjects. Yet another mentioned that members of staff report to the academic council meeting on exam results; marks are recorded on college database.

One institution spoke of a fairly rigorous process, as can be seen from the following comment: 'We have a system where we prepare statistics for our academic council meeting. All courses with a low pass % must be mentioned and reasons for the low results must be given. We also insist on an explanation of the kind of remedial work that is planned to rectify the problems. It is the responsibility of faculty heads to follow up on this and to look into the matter when part time appointments are made. We can then also look into specific subjects that create problems for instance in our distance learning when we work on hours that are scaled down. Some subjects are ideal for distance learning and for some proper assessment becomes a problem. We are then very flexible so that we can improve the Quality of training and assessing.'

A few respondents gave reasons, for analysing learners' marks as a group, such as 'To identify and help weak learners' and 'For record purposes and final decisions.' Another indicated action that would follow analysis, that 'if a whole group has performed badly extra practice sessions are organised and the test is repeated.' One stated that although there was no official structure in place, marks were analysed in attempts to improve students' performance and/or assessment method. Some intend to incorporate the practice – one respondent stated that their institution is currently thinking about analysing learners' marks as a group.

Questionnaire statement 27

We don't analyse marks. We record them.

Numbers of responses

No: 35
Yes: 13
Sometimes: 5
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 9

Comments and analysis

There were few comments on this statement, but clearly the bulk of lecturers feel that they do analyse marks. Some elaborated with statements such as 'Class attendance as a reason for poor performance is reported and followed up by management'. One stated that 'Marks are not altered once they are obtained and recorded, as these are perceived as true reflection of students' performance.'

Questionnaire statement 28

We report to a superior about our learners' marks.

Numbers of responses

No: 3
Yes: 53
Sometimes: 4
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

The comments in this section contributed to a picture of colleges with well-established internal procedures and mechanisms. The general picture is that lecturers give their results to subject heads/heads of department. Some do so after tests or test series, and others on a monthly basis. Management or the rector is then given an analysis of each lecturer's examination results. A few respondents stated that analyses would also go to college councils. One stated that only results for full time courses get sent to HoDs. One respondent stated that 'Academic head and examination control lecturers'; it is not clear whether or not this was seen negatively.

Some respondents indicated that subject committee meetings are held to discuss learners' marks and progress. A few gave reasons for this kind of process: 'To endorse them' and 'Lecturers discuss marks with senior lecturer and see where students can be helped'.

Questionnaire statement 29

We are satisfied with a process of external moderation.

Numbers of responses

No: 3
Yes: 53
Sometimes: 4
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

Most respondents interpreted this statement as 'We are happy with *the* process of internal moderation'. We were, on the contrary, attempting to ascertain, with statements 29 and 30, lecturers' opinions about external moderation in general as opposed to internal moderation. Nonetheless, the comments about the existing system provide some insight into college perceptions and practices.

The high number of 'yes' choices was backed up by various comments to the effect of 'The external moderation is fair and valid'. Many stated simply that structures and policies are in place. Some said that the 'to maintain, compare, and evaluate standards external moderation is necessary'; this comment is probably interpreting the statement the way we had intended it, and the respondent is explaining why in their view external moderation is important. Similarly, another argued that 'external moderation will improve the internal process', and another 'there are sometimes errors in question paper and memos'.

Some respondents were satisfied with the process of moderation in some subjects only. Others criticised the fact that in the main only exams were externally moderated. However, those working with SETAs had experienced other approaches, and one commented that 'we are satisfied with the process of external moderation done by SETA officials'.

There was some sense of not understanding policies and systems, as well as being confused by the variety of bodies that the colleges have to account to. Some responses indicated a misunderstanding of what external moderation means, as they mentioned subject heads as the people carrying it out. Frustration and lack of clarity about the new systems in relation to the old can be seen in this comment: 'DoE or Umalusi? There is no unified system yet! This causes immense frustrations—we're caught in between!'

There was also a sense expressed that lecturers would 'like to have more input on the process of external moderation'. Another commented: 'one cannot understand how the final moderation is done, and this leaves our students in a dilemma'.

One commented that they 'would like to do more often but expensive.'

Questionnaire statement 30

We have practices of internal moderation.

Numbers of responses

No: 11
Yes: 32
Sometimes: 16
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 3

Comments and analysis

There seem to be fairly standard processes in place in most colleges; in general 'big' tests and assignments, as well as 'mini-exams' are moderated internally by subject heads. There was a sense that the mergers will prove fruitful in this regard, as the internal moderator of one campus will be able to moderate another in the cluster. This should contribute to a sense of shared practice. There was a general sense that there are policies and practices in place with regard to internal moderation. However, this did not apply in all instances and in all institutions; for example, one respondent stated that internal moderation only took place in certain practical subjects.

Questionnaire statement 31 and 32

We have been trained as assessors.

Numbers of responses (31)

No: 10
Yes: 48
Sometimes: 2
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 3

Numbers of responses (32)

We have been accredited as assessors

No: 23
Yes: 28
Sometimes: 6
Does not apply: 0
No reply: 6

Comments and analysis

The general trend revealed in the responses to statement 31 and 32 is that many college lecturers have been trained, but fewer have been accredited as assessors. The two are discussed together, as the issues are intertwined.

It is perhaps worth noting that there was a definite sense that training was a requirement; many answers were in the negative, such as 'Not all', whereas the same point could have been expressed positively. There were many comments to the effect of 'still in process' or 'not yet'. This seems to indicate a desire to comply with policy, and perhaps a degree of anxiety about not complying fast enough. There were those for whom training was still underway, but nearing completion; 'most of our staff have been trained and are now in the final stage of completion of portfolios', captures many of the comments. A few institutions had thus far only sent their senior staff for training. There was a generally expressed feeling by respondents that all would be trained and accredited by the end of 2003.

Many lecturers had completed the training but had not completed the portfolios required for assessment. A common position was that lecturers who had done assessor training and had handed in their portfolios were still waiting to be accredited: 'our declarations of competence have been forwarded to the ETDP; awaiting certificates', and, 'we have completed our training and done our assignments through assessor training college and are awaiting results'. One stated that 'our first assessors have been accredited this week.'

The ETDP SETA and Theta were specified as the two SETAs that most colleges had dealt with. One response indicated accreditation with the IT SETA.

A distance institution indicated that most of their lecturers were trained City and Guild assessors and few have started on an RPL process to obtain their SA standard.

There was some criticism expressed about the assessor training. Some respondents felt that the standards of training between different providers varied, and that some were questionable.

One commented 'especially moderators and verifiers'; it is not clear to us what is meant.

Questionnaire statement 33

We would welcome training/more training as assessors.

Numbers of responses

No: 5
Yes: 45
Sometimes: 8

Does not apply: 3
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

Although, as discussed above, many lecturers have been trained, there is a clear sense that more training is desirable. Some respondents made comments such as 'yes as we all need training as soon as possible'. This could be lack of confidence, particularly in the new requirements, or it could be a sense of on-going professional development; the latter could be borne out by a number of comments to the effect of 'Staff development is always received positive by staff and is always welcome'. It is interesting that the general response to assessor training does not seem to be specifically tied to the (current) policy requirement of obtaining the assessor standards; most respondents seemed to be thinking more of improving their practice, and hence desired more training.

There was some sense of the need to build shared practice and learn from each other. One respondent asked for 'more examples of new grids that we need to use as an assessor to record learners' marks' and another for 'a body or person that we can direct enquiries to.'

Some respondents felt that rather than more assessor training, they required more training in their area of specialisation, as well as training specific to assessment of their area of specialisation.

One asked for moderator training.

There was a sense that all training should be done with the same accredited provider.

A few respondents thought that they were adequately trained, 'some lecturers went through sufficient training; it depends on the consultancy that offered training'. Another stated that further training is 'not necessary. I have had a number of workshops for the staff, and they need to complete their portfolios.'

The following comment captures the positive sense that most respondents expressed about assessor training: 'We want to train staff at skills centres that are also in desperate need for training. Also all new staff members. I have to comment here that the staff who have received training really benefited a lot, especially staff without other teaching qualifications and experience. The assessor training has injected new life in our lecturing staff. They are more dynamic and are able to take on new challenges. They all feel more secure and prepared for the future type of assessing in FET.'

It is important to be cautious in drawing conclusions about how valuable assessor training is. There are a variety of reasons why lecturers could enjoy being trained, including building their confidence in new systems, having a chance to spend some time with other lecturers discussing issues, et cetera. Generic assessor training may have its effect in stimulating thinking about assessment. Emerging through this research is a sense that

expertise in the field being assessed is more important than a generic assessment qualification for quality assessment in the sector. However, a broad focus on assessment can foster consideration of generic concerns, such as 'standards' and standardization.

Questionnaire statement 34

We think it is important to compare results across institutions.

Numbers of responses:

No: 5
Yes: 50
Sometimes: 5
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 2

Comments and analysis

Although the bulk of respondents agreed with the statement, some felt that students from different backgrounds cannot be compared, as some are disadvantaged, and the environment from one institution to another is different.

However, this was a minority view. The majority of those who commented indicated that comparisons are useful and necessary: in terms of being able to standardise; national results were seen as a benchmark; comparisons enabled lecturers to determine the relative efficacy of their teaching process. One respondent captured the general trend by stating 'definitely, it is important to find out who are centres of excellence and to use them as role models for other centres. Colleges must also be aware that bad practices will become known. We owe to our clients to strive for the best top quality education and training.'

A distance institution stated that because it has students all over the country, they are not sure which institutions they would compare with.

Questionnaire statement 35

We would assess differently if we had more freedom to make our own choices.

Numbers of responses

No: 21
Yes: 24
Sometimes: 8
Does not apply: 5
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

As seen from the numbers, respondents were fairly evenly split on this matter.

A desire to have better links with industry came across strongly from a number of respondents; 'if we had funding to assess our students in a practical situation or if we could form partnerships with enough industries for them to assess students in the workplace. In instances where it does happen like Footware, Educare and funeral services, we can see positive results'.

There was also a desire expressed to work more with colleagues from other institutions and a sense of thinking through more carefully what lecturers really want to assess, and what they should be looking for in the learners. Some felt that institutional and national assessment requirements constrain teaching and learning. One would like to do more continuous assessment; this would enable students to work at their own pace and ability, and move to the next module when found competent.

Some respondents stipulated observation, presentations, coaching, and working with smaller groups more on one-to-one basis as assessment methods that they would prefer to use. One respondent suggested that they could 'use RPL more often and perhaps shorten the term of study'. However, this is contradicted by many comments in the following section which say that there is insufficient time in the current terms.

There was a feeling expressed by a few respondents of being overwhelmed by paper work, and that they would like to spend more time on more 'meaningful' aspects of assessment.

There was also widely expressed frustration with the external exams. Some felt that they did not test the whole syllabus. Others felt that more observation was required; particularly in computers, the exam paper was seen as limiting assessment of certain areas, such as 'did the learner save his documents properly, could he move toolbars, format a diskette, etc'. Some respondents felt that the national exam causes lecturers to train learners to pass the exam but not to reach the real outcome of a specific competency. There was a feeling that theory and practice needed to be better integrated than it was currently in the exams, and also that there should be a move to more practically oriented courses. Another stated that 'if we are not driven by the exams we will only concentrate on the important relevant facts'. One said they would like to do away with exams completely.

On the other hand, many respondents indicated that they are happy with the present system. Some felt that testing is prescribed by the syllabus, and could see no reason to differ from it. One felt that the current assessment system for 'Language Communication programmes' is good; there is a 'well balanced 'weight' system according to which the following must be assessed: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis,

and evaluation'. Some also felt that they had sufficient freedom to decide over assessment; this was particularly in the workshops.

There was a sense of frustration at the system of evaluating students to be competent or not competent. Some respondents felt that even if they had to do that in the final results, they would use 'marks as indicators of students' potential' during the course of their programmes.

One respondent, who indicated that they would assess differently, stated that they would like more freedom, but are awaiting directives from the department and the ETQAs Another, who would not assess differently, stated that there is no formal policy.

There was a suggestion that other official languages should be included as business languages; it was not clear whether or not this related specifically to assessment, or whether the respondent was simply expressing a generally felt concern.

One referred to having done no formal assessments as yet, but indicated changing practice. The process of assessment for some is set by the SETA

Questionnaire statement 36

We would assess differently if we had more time.

Numbers of responses

No: 19
Yes: 33
Sometimes: 3
Does not apply: 3
No reply: 5

Comments and analysis

There were mixed feelings in this regard, with fairly strongly expressed opinions in both directions. The majority of comments reflect the numbers above; there was a clear sense from most respondents of being constrained by time, both in terms of teaching and assessing.

A few felt that they would send learners to workplaces for assessment, or have better links with industry in terms of assessment, if they had more time. Others felt they would do more practical assessments. Another stated that they would do more group work, projects, self assessments, and peer assessments, and still another said that they would like to assess all the work done, and the values and attitudes of students. It is not clear whether these are simply parts of the current discourse which they feel obliged to mention, or are assessment practices that they would indeed implement.

A few commented on class size in relation to time constraints, as captured in the following comment: 'time is really a big problem especially on the engineering side. Big classes also create a problem for some types of assessment. Interviews with students and tutorial sessions will be ideal but with the time limits are almost impossible to implement.' Many felt that class size constrains the amount of feedback that each student could receive, but that more time would also enable them to provide better attention to individuals.

Many of the comments seemed to actually relate to a desire for more teaching time, rather than necessarily more assessment time, such as 'Spend more time to ensure that learners really master the skills' and 'Syllabus too full at this stage'. The view in the latter comment was expressed by a few respondents. This feeling came across most strongly in relation to practical subjects: 'I would like smaller classes where I can spend more quality time with each learner. With 30 students in one computer class it is not possible to be 100% available for every student's needs.' Also, teaching and assessing time were particularly felt to be a problem by a distance institution, that stated that 'trimesters and semesters are too short for distance education. We depend on the post and external tutors, and most of our students work full time.'

Another respondent stated that additional time would be spent on developing and assessing grammar skills, and more simulation skills would be developed. Comments such as 'We would give each learner suitable time to become competent' could also imply that lecturers feel that learners are being rushed into assessments when they are not yet ready.

Assessing practical work, seen by many as desirable, needs more time. For example, in Computer Studies, 'Each student has to be assessed individually for skills on computer by observation. One-on-one situations and recording is time consuming'. Another respondent would do more behavioural observations, and 'skills assessment could be accommodated'. Another thought that lecturers needed 'more time for practical work and more assignments for students to complete'. They added that 'life skills can be incorporated in the programmes and not an examination driven process'.

There was some sense that respondents were dealing with learners with learning difficulties, and therefore required more time and different methods of testing.

There were a few comments which seemed to indicate that respondents felt constrained by factors other than time, but did not specify what these were, commenting: . 'Time is not the problem' and 'constraints from institution'. Other comments may point to some constraints, some of which do bear on time, such as a heavy workload, and unsuitable, overloaded curricula.

Overall, the sense is that new assessment policies require a 'lengthy process' that is difficult to take to scale.

Questionnaire statement 37

We think language makes written examinations less reliable.

Numbers of responses

No: 7
Yes: 34
Sometimes: 17
Does not apply: 1
No reply: 4

Comments and analysis

Some of the strongest and most vehemently expressed comments were made in this area, and many respondents made comments indicating problems with language. Nearly all comments were to the effect that the majority of their students struggle with the medium of instruction. There were many general comments in this regard, such as 'Language is a barrier to second language learners' and 'Students not proficient in English as this is their second language.' Respondents pointed out, that for many of the students, English is their third or fourth language.

Language was particularly felt to be a problem in written examinations: 'Students have a serious problem in interpreting questions. They don't have sufficient knowledge of the language' and 'Students are writing the exams in their second and in some cases third language. This must be a barrier for students'. Respondents noted problems both with understanding questions and expressing themselves, such as 'there is a huge language problem in the way of understanding and expressing themselves'.

In skills areas, however, there was also a feeling that learners often don't understand the instructions during observations. There was some feeling that students might be competent in the required skills, and disadvantaged by their weak English: 'Students often don't understand the questions but would be able to demonstrate their skills.' Similarly, another respondent stated that 'language barriers definitely have an impact on the reliability of written exams. Some students reach the outcomes of the practical work but really struggle with the theory because of language'.

There were some suggestions as to how to address language problems. One respondent thought that examinations should be conducted in all eleven official languages. One respondent commented, 'Own discretion to be used', presumably implying that lecturers should compensate for language difficulties. A few respondents suggested oral exams for learners with 'language problems', and similarly, one commented that 'people sometimes verbalise better in a structured interview than in a written test'. Written expression was

seen as a problem. Another respondent thought that using signs would increase the level of understanding, as opposed to instructions. We are not entirely clear what was meant by 'signs' in this regard. One respondent pointed to the possibility of assessing demonstrations rather than through language based means.

A different perspective on the matter was raised by one respondent, who stated that 'some of the questions from exams are ambiguous (not clearly indicate what is required)' implying that assessors could do more to alleviate aspects of the language problem.

One respondent argued that language skills, especially written skills, are vital skills.

38 Additional comments

We have reproduced all additional comments received, and have grouped them according to the main themes which emerge. These are unsolicited comments.

Assessor training

A desire for assessment and moderator accreditation training to be completed was expressed, and that such training is beneficial for the sector.

'We request that all lecturers/educators be assessed before May 2004. South African economy needs to grow and the more we have assessors, moderators, and accreditation in our colleges, I'm sure our standard especially in technical and vocational education will improve. Its time to put things into practice.'

Competency

'Competency is relative and subjective. Different standards and variables/different standards of competency.'

Role of national examinations and the role of the SETAs

The comment points to the 'in-between' state of assessment for non-formal courses in relation to the formal and structured external examinations. It calls for the development of capacity in assessment and the accreditation of 'courses' and highlights a perceived role for SETAs.

'It is important to note that the National Department of Education examinations are carried out for all our courses e.g. N1 to N6. These are external examinations and are conducted like they have always been although there's a term mark. The non-formal courses i.e. the practical courses are evaluated according to the current status of that particular course. In this regard the SETAs have a huge role to play and in most cases the assessments are not quite where they are supposed to be. There is a move towards NQF based qualifications but the assessments thereof are not conducted properly because of the lack of capacity. There are plans to increase the number of qualified assessors and also staff members who can design assessment tools and moderate assessment. The biggest set back to achieve this is funding.'

Conflicting system requirements

The following comment points to a concern with the effects of broad structures and tensions on assessment practice.

'Just a few requests PLEASE. When are Umalusi and national DoE going to start coordinating practices. We get so many pieces of conflicting info. AND the SETAs system? Where do we stand in terms of offering so-called 'accredited' programmes. We are not allowed to continue with initiatives because we are not accredited and this is the case because apparently Umalusi is 'not in place'. We are not allowed to contact other SETA's because Umalusi is our ETQA—our via to other SETA's.'

'It would be appreciated if we could be provided with more information or guidelines on the different structures and approaches: OBE/assessment/certification of qualifications/writing of learning programmes/student support in a multi-cultural education system.'

Sense of moving to a different system

Anticipated are new curricula and assessment practices that are more 'authentic'

.

'The present subject content is not always job related and will change in the future when our new courses are developed.'

'If the students could have the opportunity to work outside the class room they will perform better. The 'real' world will help them to see their own mistakes and the class room will help with the solutions. The only objection that I have with this method of assessing is that there are not enough time to do assessment properly. There are a lot of paper work to be done whereas this time could have been spend on the learners.'

'We do have assessment and moderation policies in place but due to our current learning content has not yet utilised it in full'

'My opinion that computer training for e.g. word processing, spread sheets, and other application programmes was well done and well assessed. The learner was prepared for the work environment. We should build on what we have done and prepare the learner in those areas of computer use that was not examinable. We must also guide against such a lot of paper work for recording purposes that the training of a person to be skilled in the use of the computer is not a priority any more.'

Other

'We received our Theta accreditation and are currently offering the NQF five level food and beverage and professional cookery qualifications. Our internal quality assurance systems are in place and update continuously as necessary.'

'Continuous assessment should be compulsory. Introduce summative assessment e.g. summative 40% formative 60%. Use rubric system in assessing essay type questions. Encourage peer and group assessment.'

7. SHORT CASE STUDY OF A PRIVATE MULTI-PURPOSE TVET COLLEGE

This case is described on the basis of a three-hour site visit to a campus of the college. Two informants provide the information, the principal and a facilitator who also assesses. Notes on observations of the campus were made. The purpose of the case study is to flesh out some of the research findings from the questionnaires through an in depth look at one institution. We do not cross verify claims made in these interviews and take them at face value.

The college has 14 branches countrywide. It is managed by a directorate of 5, positioned in different colleges. Their office covers areas pertaining to financial management, academic issues and accreditation, personnel, logistics and contracts, marketing, product development and stock. While the overall institution has 14 branches, we refer to this branch of the college as the 'college' for convenience of expression. This college has 6 full time members of staff.

The principal of the college is a former teacher, with honours level degrees in both a discipline and in education. He sees himself primarily as an educationist and thus profit is not his main motivation. Because the college staff, with the principal as spokesman, espouse educational ideals over profit, they feel that they offer students a good deal as part of their 'social responsibility'. For example, in addition to the qualifications offered, students get driving lessons, because to be able to have a vehicle driving license is seen as important for the world of work. Staff at the college claim they 'make a living rather than make a profit'.

TARGETS AND STUDENTS

The college, situated on the second floor of an office building has and enrolment of about 220 fulltime students. A facilitator is available from 8am to 7pm on weekdays, as well as from 9am to12pm on Saturdays for the part-time students.

The college's aim is that the student 'can do the work at the end of the day'. The students' employability thus counts and the college's reputation is staked on how well its students do in business.

The college's main market is school leavers 'at different stages', such as those who failed grade 12. But it can also work in the corporate market, and provide training through contracts for other educational institutions, especially training for end-user computing. In such cases, students would be assessed by the contracting institutions.

In many instances members of staff at the college feel that they are more in the 'front running' than the public technical colleges which they see are more hampered by the syllabi and cumbersome routes to changes to courses. They see themselves as more flexible in making changes to meet new business needs.

Payments for students are typically about R295 a month. The longer students stay with the college the better for the college, but they can go through the course as quickly as they can (though it is then difficult for the college to get the remainder of their enrolment fee of 10 instalments of R295). The college has to cover costs of the courseware and software registration. For example, it pays R68 000 for Microsoft software licenses. Juta manuals cost R60 a manual

COURSES AND COURSEWARE

About 70% of the courses offered at this college are computer-related, and include office skills, management, and tourism. The training structure is that of self-paced courses ('nie a wors masjien nie') in an office-type environment. The courses are not lecture based, though there are lectures on tape which students listen to on the campus. In addition, the college provides training CDs, for example on the 'office environment', and students are sent into companies to do assignments. Students also have to attend workshops. Courseware is developed centrally in the country, in the 'product development department', as are assignments, examinations and marksheets. For some of the work of the college, Juta's courseware is used.

ASSESSMENT

The college sees assessment as very central, 'We must assess what we are supposed to assess'. The college sees the role for Umalusi as that of setting out the groundwork for assessment.

Examinations **set** by the development department are discussed by the directors of the company, who are also principals of colleges. Exams can be changed immediately because they are 'in-house'.

The college is attempting to increase the **practical part** of exams, especially in the computer subjects. On the Excel exam, 15% is theory and the rest is practical. In some subjects, practical application marks are kept, and count toward the final mark, but mostly marks are based on the final exam.

Students are **informed** on what will be tested in the manual given. The courseware is explicit about assessment and at the end of chapters, one finds tasks and quizzes, summaries and practical applications.

Outcomes are mostly **self-assessed** through the training, though some are assessed by training advisors or facilitators. Students are given a pre-exam similar to the exam they will get, and need at least 70% for the pre-exam before they can sit the final exam. If they fail to get the required 70% they get sent back to redo the course at no extra cost. About 10 -12% redo the course. The final pass mark is 60%.

Students know exams are set centrally. Each book has a bar code number and the exam has the same bar code number, so each student can only write that particular exam. Each student has a file, and his or her practical application progress sheet will go into a portfolio, which the student can take to apply for a job. The theory questions vary year by year and are drawn from a bank of questions.

Exams are set centrally, but marked in each college, then sent for **moderation** to a central office where 40% of each college's exams is moderated by the moderating department.

The college will get information back about **problems**, and the principal will discuss the concerns with facilitators. He plans to check each batch of exams before sending it off to ascertain any discrepancies. Further, problems with assessment are picked up through student complaints. On one theoretical course, many students failed, and staff found that the language that was used in the exam was 'Oxford English'. This was rectified. The college has a student representative council and students know the line of procedure.

The biggest assessment challenges for students in computers are the practicals as they have to know how to work with the programmes. Assessors assess the practicals through the product, but comments on the process can be made. If there is a dispute, students can ask another facilitator to reassess them. Because of openness about the assessment process, mostly students and lecturers agree. Students may talk to each other about what they were examined on.

Practical marks are sent to the moderator for the computer courses (Word, Excel, Windows 98, Access, PowerPoint, and Outlook). The assessors on the practicals may send comments to the moderators on time taken by the students, whether they had to redo the work, attitudes, and so on. Moderators could ask how the practicals were dealt with and what the student reactions were.

For some courses, the practical counts 50% and **feedback** consists of online correction or verbal explanations to students. The colleges do not provide much written feedback on assignments.

While they tear up pre-exams, the moderator keeps all exams while the college keeps the cover sheet and students keep their files. The cover sheets stays in the college for 5 years, in a safe. Students have a line of communication with the moderator and could ask the moderator to recheck if there is a dispute.

All the branches of the college look at **pass marks**, distributed from a central office. If problems are found, the examinations and processes are reviewed. Certificates are issued once all subjects are complete. These are managed, and printed and embossed centrally.

VIEWS OF CHANGING ASSESSMENT

The principal speaks of the importance of assessment, and of the frustrations he experiences when people see assessment as exams only. He speaks of the need for a 'mindshift' about assessment, from which we infer he has made this shift. He sees assessor training as very important, though tainted by 'people jumping on the training bandwagon' in a shallow way for profit.

The principal speaks of the need to turn the whole system around. People were 'thrown into deep water' when rather they should have been trained in new approaches. Also, changes in assessment should have preceded curriculum changes.

College staff members do not feel adequately trained for assessment, and one person from each college will go on assessor training in November. However, the principal is not optimistic about assessor training, and will 'wait to see'. He is skeptical of motives and expresses a need for the rules to be the same across level 4 institutions. If educators in the public colleges don't need assessor training, neither should they. This concern with comparability recurs in the interview.

RELATIONSHIP WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE BODIES AND STANDARDIZATION

The college's contact with Umalusi has been in trying to register. It is provisionally accredited (for six months), and has framed its provisional accreditation certificate, which hangs on a wall in reception.

The college expresses difficulties in meeting government requirements for registration as 'nothing on the ground is in place'. Franchises can't be registered, and each branch must get provisional accreditation although they 'do the same thing'. Some colleges that offer courses in the HET band use that registration number to 'sell the FET stuff'. Competitors use the fact that some colleges are not registered. Again, the principal asserts that the playing fields are not level and expresses a need for the 'same rules' and that 'standards must be the same'. Umalusi, he feels, through the accreditation process must benchmark the courses. The principal does not agree that the public sector should be automatically accredited. Accreditation should be the way to standardize, and the process must be the same for everyone.

The principal speaks of unit standards as the way to accredit courses. Courses must cover the unit standards and test the outcomes. The assessment process in place allows colleges to say whether the student has met the standards of the unit standards. The principal expresses dissatisfaction with a perceived inequality of process. Private colleges have to

go through an assessment process to get the unit standards while 'college x just gets a national exam, and is trained to write that national exam', then 'at the end of the day, both at the same level would be a misinterpretation'. He sees the national exam as easy to assess, but questions what is assessed, asserting that it is the 'power of the short-term memory of the learner'.

The college supports the idea that assessment is the most important part of the accreditation system. The interviewees say that they will, 'stand and fall on assessment'. However, they feel that short courses are harder to manage, and there needs to be control over what is tested. An international system, such as with the IDCL would mean not having to 'reinvent the wheel', but the problem with external certification is that it is too expensive. A single exam could cost about R500 for a student which is too expensive for most of their students.

Other inequalities referred to include comparisons between colleges within sectors, where differences in provision exist within both the public sector and the private sectors. Poorly run institutions in the public sector are however, accredited. And within the private sector, differences should be noted. For example, if one college invests a huge amount into the development of a manual for students and another college 'around the corner' gives the students 10 pages, then the latter must be closed as they are not giving students a good deal, illustrating that one 'Can't lump all private colleges under the same banner'.

Delays in legislation affect the colleges. The delay in the FET act 'means people are not being registered' and 'the fly by nights are opening up', referring to a nearby nursing college that is not associated with a hospital. Accreditation would allow the colleges to continue to attract students, who get put off coming to them because they hear that they must be at registered institutions. The college needs a reference number so those students can phone to find out about the college's status. This 'registration issue', they claim is not getting sorted out and rumours spread among the students who may go on strike. The delay in legislation thus impacts on the learners.

VIEWS OF PRIVATE PROVISION

While there may be a negative view of the private colleges, members of staff in this college believe that there is a big demand for the kind of training they do and they can keep up with the immediate needs of business. They would appreciate someone looking at their exams as they believe it shows their commitment to education. 'You can't play around with people's future'.

RESULTS AND RELIABILITY

The students' marks generally range between 'middle' and 'high' class—those that like studying and those that learn what they need to know do well; others rewrite the assessment three weeks later, on Fridays.

Reliability is an important notion for this college in assessment, especially as students write at different times. They have stock examinations which change from time to time.

The college staff does some external examining on bookkeeping courses set up by a financial institution, which allows them to benchmark with other institutions.

8. PRIVATE COLLEGES IN THE TVET SECTOR QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT

PURPOSE AND METHOD

This section of the research looks at private colleges. Although it is small in scale, this section serves to describe some assessment practices and capture a range of views to further inform the options generated on the quality assurance of assessment.

Questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions were sent through the Association of Private Providers of Education, Training, and Development to private colleges. Twelve questionnaires were returned and analyzed. In addition one case study was undertaken through a site visit.

PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

The responses to the closed questions on the questionnaire are tabulated and responses to the open ended questions summarised. Questions are grouped for the analysis.

Tabulated responses reflect the actual number of responses. For some questions, responses were not given, and hence totals per question may differ.

As the number of respondents is small, we make no attempt to generalise. Rather we provide a view of a range of practices in institutions that responded to the email questionnaire. We assume that the respondents are able to accurately report assessment practices within their institutions.

Among the respondent institutions were central institutions with satellites, distance education institutions, and franchise holders. Institutions varied in size. Some catered for fewer than 100 learners and others for 36 000. From responses, we assume that English is not the main language for many of these learners.

While one or two institutions offered specific subjects, for example one college offered only subjects in design, most respondent colleges were multi-purpose institutions covering a wide range of courses, and therefore in some sense analogous to public FET colleges. To provide a flavour of the variety of courses offered we list most of the areas of study mentioned. These areas or subjects, in no particular order, include: business skills, computers, block making, plumbing, building, hospitality, food preparation, housekeeping, automotive, mechanical, electronics, electrical, medical reception, medical representation, life skills, call centre, child, industrial and sports psychology, various kinds of counselling, pet grooming, gardening and horticulture, farming for small

holders, interpersonal skills, art appreciation, photography, dress making, interior decorating, fashion, flower arranging, beauty, wedding consultancy, day-care, educational management, home health care, fitness and nutrition, modelling, handwriting analysis, journalism, personal training, restaurant management, international bartending, game ranging, multi media language studies, storemanship and store management, theology, church leadership, conflict resolution, marriage officiating, communication, mathematical literacy, and personal finance, among others. Most offered something in information technology. The offerings cover a wide range of areas of study.

Assessment methods and focus

We use only written tests or examinations in assessment.

No 9
Yes 2
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

We use a combination of methods of assessment.

No 1
Yes 10
Sometimes
Does not apply 1

We assess our students' practical work.

No 3
Yes 9
Sometimes
Does not apply

We have a system of continuous assessment.

No
Yes 12
Sometimes
Does not apply

We assess mainly facts or content.

No 3
Yes 4
Sometimes 2
Does not apply

We assess skills

No
Yes 9
Sometimes 2
Does not apply

We test values and attitudes.

No 5
Yes 4
Sometimes 2
Does not apply

Responses indicated a range of assessment practices, including the assessment of visually and orally communicated work and the assessment of practical work. Hence, it appears that skills are assessed. The claimed range of practices is in keeping with respondents' comments on outcomes-based education and continuous assessment, espousing alignment with new policies.

Students' final marks were composed of the results of different tasks; assignments, projects, and tests, compiled in some cases in portfolios. Some institutions collated the results of continuous assessment such as the assessment tasks at the end of each 'study guide'. Other institutions assessed formatively to prepare students for end of course summative assessments. Ratios of assignments to exams varied: with ratios of 50:50 and 70:30 given. Some provided symbols, others, marks.

Responses in this grouping related to forms of assessment. Institutions claimed to test skills, with a mode of 50% but ranging from 20% to 100% of the grading (the latter in computers). Knowledge and skill were tested in assignments and projects. Less testing of skills was said to be done in more 'subjective' courses. However, the understanding of what constitutes 'skills' varied from observable performance of operations to 'skills such as the ability to interpret information, to apply theory etc'. One institution referred to 'reflexive' skills. Overall, it appears that assessment covered more than factual recall, but skills and 'insights' too.

The assessment of attitude was not typical, with responses ranging from being unable to assess attitude to having insufficient time or means to assess attitude. One institution referred to the need for accredited assessors to assess 'attitude' of learners.

Feedback on assessment

We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback only.

No 5
Yes 2
Sometimes
Does not apply 1

We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback, but we also record their marks to use for promotion.

No 1
Yes 10

Sometimes
Does not apply

Respondents all claimed to assess continuously, and that the results of these assessments were recorded. Two respondent institutions provided marks strictly for formative purposes. Where examinations were external, 'strictly' formative assessment was used 'by facilitators during training to correct problems occurring in the learning of the required competencies', toward summative assessment.
Assessment was used both summatively and formatively in some cases. 'Formative assessment counted 30% of the final mark. All learners received feedback with each formative assessment.'

We give only marks on assessments.

No 5
Yes 5
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

We give many types of feedback on assessments.

No 2
Yes 8
Sometimes 2
Does not apply

We meet our students to discuss assessments.

No 4
Yes 6
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

The field of respondents was divided on the types of feedback given. Some gave only marks and others provided commentary and marks or symbols. Briefing sessions during which the feedback and results were discussed were mentioned. Institutions that were providing distance education however, were unlikely to meet students; one commented, 'the Centre is a distance education provider therefore the feedback we provide our learners is of a written nature, however learners may contact the Centre to discuss their assessment'.

Our students assess themselves.

No 3
Yes 4
Sometimes 4
Does not apply

Our students assess each other.

No 8

Yes
Sometimes 2
Does not apply 1

Typically, learners were expected to assess themselves formatively on specific outcomes, for example, 'Self assessment test together with model answers form an integral part of all learning programmes'; 'We have outsourced assessors who fulfil this [assessment] function. Learners do not formally assess themselves'. Where students, atypically, assessed each other, it was for formative purposes only. One respondent from a distance institution did not see any possibilities for peer assessment.

Assessing bodies

We do assessments set by an outside assessment body only.

No 8
Yes 1
Sometimes 3
Does not apply

We do assessments set internally only.

No 1
Yes 8
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

Most of the respondents referred to internal assessment, but referred also to a range of practices; offering packaged courses (e.g. by Microsoft), assessments developed in-house and externally moderated, and a combination of in house and external examinations. Examinations referred to in 'computers' included A+ and ICDL among others. Various combinations of outsourcing of assessors and moderators, or externally set papers were noted. In one case assessment was only internal because the institution 'provides education to a niche market; it was therefore difficult to find expert, external assessment bodies'.

Professional conversations

We discuss the assessments we set with our colleagues before the learners write.

No 1
Yes 7
Sometimes 2
Does not apply 1

The assessors or those who are testing or marking the students discuss the tests and the way they are marking with each other.

No 4
Yes 7
Sometimes
Does not apply 1

Discussion or review of assessments did mostly take place in this group of respondents, and in some cases was referred to as 'extensive quality control'. One institution reported that the Examination Board met fortnightly to discuss assessments and outcomes. Others reported a consultative basis for setting assessments, 'so as to ensure that the assessment is set at the right level etc'.

Variation was found with respect to discussions of marking. In some, marking was done at a national office only. In others, assessors met frequently 'to discuss assessments and to make improvements', or to supplement memos, sometimes by email or phone. Some saw no need for discussion as 'Exam answers to questions are definitive with little scope of ambiguity'. One respondent referred to a tutor college 'set up to maintain a high standard of assessment'.

Preparation for assessment

We identify students who may fail through an early assessment.

No 1
Yes 9
Sometimes
Does not apply 1

We provide support for 'at risk' students.

No
Yes 11
Sometimes
Does not apply

We help students to prepare for their assessments.

No
Yes 11
Sometimes
Does not apply

Respondents were positive about identifying students at risk through early assessments and providing additional tutoring and support for these students. Support ranged from evaluating learners on a daily basis, 'Evaluations are done by the faculty at the end of each day' to referring them to a 'student development institute'. For some, examination

times appeared to be flexible, and 'Students write when they feel that they are ready for the examination'.

Students not 'at risk' were also prepared for assessments in some institutions: 'Detailed guides enable learners to prep for assessments'. One felt that students were prepared through '[a]ssessment criteria provided with courseware on unit standard based programmes'. One stated, 'We hold briefing sessions at every workshop to prepare and explain assessments'.

Validity

We talk about whether our assessments test what we want them to test.

No 2
Yes 7
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

With assessments outcomes based, it was assumed that assessments were valid, work focused, and 'designed to meet the objectives of the client'. Advisory boards existed in some to 'continuously evaluate assessment methods for relevance'. The notion that 'outcomes-based' or 'competence-based' or 'criterion-referenced' assessment approaches are inherently valid and reliable have of course been theoretically and empirically disproved, but seem to have a strong hold in South Africa. This is perhaps something Umalusi needs to consider, together with the notion of 'standard'..

Moderation

We have a process of internal moderation of assessments before the learners get them.

No 2
Yes 7
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

We have a process of internal moderation of the marking itself.

No 3
Yes 7
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

We have a process of internal moderation of marks or assessment results.

No 3
Yes 6
Sometimes 2
Does not apply

We have a process of external moderation.

No 6
Yes 4
Sometimes
Does not apply

Moderation of assessment tasks and grading was reported. In some smaller campuses, moderation was the task of the principal. In a college with satellite campuses, tests were standardised and marked at the National Office. In another, the Learning Programme Development Division moderated. This process could thus be external to the campus but internal to the college (similar, in some ways, to the public system). External examination was seen to be desirable by those who reported that it 'is still to be implemented according to assessment strategy'. For one, moderation was '[n]ewly implemented'.

Typical reports of moderation of marking claimed to look at about 10% of student assessments in the 'first class', 10% of those who were not yet competent, and about 10% of those in-between. In one report, assessments were 'individualised', implying no moderation of marking.

A lack of a suitable agency for external moderation for learnerships was reported, 'for learnerships at FET Level, there isn't any external body that fulfil this function and SETA ETQA's are reluctant to get involved'.

Moderation in one large college was highly structured, but it was not clear whether the structure pertained to the HET or FET sectors. The respondent stated, 'Assessors who have been assessing for a minimum of two years, who have been a briefing tutor for a minimum of two years and has the right academic qualifications, will qualify to become a moderator. They will apply to the Academic Director and will be interviewed and trained before being appointed as moderators. External examiners are appointed by the Academic Director based on their Academic Qualifications and extensive experience in the particular subject area. External examiners are made up of both local and international academics'. However, it did indicate seriousness to assessment. The purpose of training of tutors and markers in this college was to ensure consistency.

Analysis and reporting

We analyse learner marks as a group.

No 4
Yes 4
Sometimes 2
Does not apply 1

Where learner marks were analysed, the distributions of marks were looked at by campuses and in some cases central offices: 'The Centre analyses the marks to ensure

that standards are maintained and that the assessment was valid'. For some, an analysis of overall numbers of learners, passes and failures was provided and only when problem areas were identified were marks analysed.

We report to a superior about our learners' marks.

No 3
Yes 6
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

A college with satellite campuses submitted reports to the National Office. In others, reports went from the training facilitator, to principal, to moderator, or, reports were made available to the project leader and the mentors of the learners.

Assessor training

We have been trained as assessors.

No 5
Yes 5
Sometimes
Does not apply

We have been accredited as assessors.

No 6
Yes 1
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

We would welcome training/more training as assessors.

No 2
Yes 6
Sometimes
Does not apply 1

Some college staff in the private colleges had been trained as assessors against the unit standards, 'Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning Outcomes'. Some regarded academic qualifications or prior learning as training. In one, training was internal. In some, assessment training was in process through an assessment college. As in the public institutions, some of the trainers had done the training but still had to submit their portfolios.

Finances were a concern, and one college reported that it was, 'Working on plan to train all assessors for free'. Another welcomed affordable training ('Most definitely, at a nominal cost'). Two colleges, in part because of finances, claimed that assessment training was not necessary,

> 'The whole idea of accredited assessors has the danger of making the training of leaders who have to catch up much more expensive. Since we work with the poorest of the poor, we need to provide our practical training at a cost that is attainable…. Our assessors have 20 years experience of this work, and do not feel a need for further training'.

Standardization

We think it is important to compare results across institutions.

No 4
Yes 5
Sometimes 1
Does not apply

The views on this question differed. One institution did not value cross comparison because the 'standard of education varies widely between providers', while another affirmed the importance of comparisons to 'maintain a standard'. For another, comparisons were not viewed as possible, 'it is difficult…as we operate in a niche market therefore there are very few, if any, institutions to be compared against'.

Language

We think language makes written examinations less reliable.

No 2
Yes 4
Sometimes 3
Does not apply

Responses referred to the main languages of learners differing from the language in assessments, 'Most of our student's first language is not English' and 'Assessments are normally undertaken in English. Where English is not the learner's native language, understanding may be hampered and may not allow learner to perform at his/her optimum', and that where many of the learners are '2nd language English speakers', 'they are at a disadvantage when it comes to written assessments'. But the view was also expressed that some examinations were largely practical or short answers and hence language was not a major problem.

Changes

We would assess differently if we had more time.

No 7
Yes
Sometimes 2
Does not apply 1

There was not a strong sense from responses that assessment would be different if there was more time partly because assessments could occur continuously throughout the training and learners could be assessed when ready.

Changes desired.

A question about how colleges would assess differently revealed a range of concerns: the need for more formal training in assessment especially in special areas like design; knowledge of or development of unit standards with specific outcomes; a desire for traditional examinations.

Constraints on the way assessments were conducted pertained to the type of institution; for example, distance institutions might assess differently if not constrained by the distance mode of delivery. Financial resources constrained a desire to provide 'one on one' assessment.

Some expressed that their assessment methods met industry needs and enabled them to identify problems and thence were best not changed; that current methods of assessment 'suits industry and gives us the peace of mind that we are able to identify problem areas sooner via our assessment system'. Confidence was furthered by the moderation process, 'We also feel that our internal moderation system allows us to improve our delivery, the standard of our facilitators, our materials and adds value to our organisation as a whole'.

The development of professional judgement of competency was expressed as desirable, and recognised as complex.

> We still use a mark system, but it is tied up with a competency system as well so that facilitators are able to develop their own judgement skills over time. It is not an overnight process to enable facilitators and learners to understand the competency judgement. Our marking memo's also link the facilitator up with the unit standard by requiring judgement on the assessment criteria, but the switch-over is a longer process than one would imagine.

Understandings of quality assurance of assessment

In this section we provide some quotations to reflect views of quality assurance. We group these under thematic headings.

Fairness, reliability and authenticity

Comments grouped under this theme pertain to the importance that assessment is a fair and reliable reflection of learners' competence for the world of work. Outcomes must be derived from work goals, and assessed against 'established measurable standards'. Terms mentioned included validity, reliability, fairness, flexibility, authenticity, transparency of process and criteria, currency, sufficiency of evidence, and usefulness and value of assessment outcomes.

> 'Assessment should be reliable and fair, should be a reflection of the students' knowledge, skills and values and prepare the student for further study or the world of work. Review and remedy systems need to be in place to ensure that these goals are continually achieved';

It was also felt that it must be fit for its purpose; be uniform and standardised. Overall, these colleges referred to the need for transparent and clearly defined outcomes, criteria and assessment instruments, valid and reliable assessments drawing on a range of assessment processes within coherent learning programmes which provide feedback to learners and account to authorities. But these practices must have 'practicability'.

Quality assurance process

The quality assurance process was seen as the 'process by which the necessary quality requirements for assessment are checked and maintained'. Standardization was seen by some as part of this, but the notion of 'unambiguous' standards was not problematised: 'There needs to be a standard across providers to ensure that assessment is fair and valid. Unambiguous standards will ensure quality and a measure for that quality'. A role was seen for moderation in standardization, 'The use of moderation ensures the equity and fairness of assessments'.

In addition, for quality in assessment, assessments should be carried out by someone with the necessary expertise; whether they are qualified to assess at a particular level should be monitored. Evidence from assessments should be kept, and security maintained.

Assessment policies were mentioned.

Assessment for quality

The centrality of assessment for quality was seen in the following:

> 'In our organisation, assessment acts as the pivot around which all learning is geared and assessment also determines the delivery of our quality. Our assessment system is integrated with the learning programme, links up with the facilitator training, ties in with contact time, influences material development etc. We endeavour to add a quality link to each phase of assessment, from design, to activity to judgement'.

Quality further required reflexivity; 'Quality assessment starts from within'.

Colleges' view of considerations for Umalusi.

These views appeared under 'Other comments'.

- A suggestion was made that Umalusi draw up a Discussion Document on Assessment and circulate this for input.

- The recognition of prior learning was seen by one college to be critical. It requested that RPL be formalised in all institutions with clear guidelines available.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Research Protocol for the case studies—learners

- What is the main way in which you are assessed? Please give some details.
- Do you believe that the assessments you do accurately reflect what you have learned?
- Do you believe that the assessments you do accurately reflect what you can do in your chosen field?
- Do you consider the assessment processes that you have in the college to be fair?
- Are you informed about how you will be assessed? If so, how? If not, have you ever asked your lecturers for this information? (note—looking for information on criteria, dates and times, methods)
- What type of feedback (marks, comments) do you get from your educators or assessors? How do you use this feedback? Can you show us an example of an assessment that has useful feedback for you?
- What kind of reports do you get? What kind of way should your assessment feedback be reported? Who should know the feedback?
- Are you ever asked your opinions about assessment? If so, in what way?
- What do you value about assessment?
- If you were to change one thing about assessment in your college, what would that be?
- What helps you to know what to do?
- What do you think of continuous assessment done at your college?
- What would/could you do if you had a problem with assessment?

Research Protocol for the case studies—lecturers

- What information do you give students about assessment? How and when is this information given?
- Do you ever talk to the examining bodies about assessment? If so, what sorts of issues are discussed and what has been their response?
- What proportion of assessment is formative, and how are the results of these assessments recorded?
- How do you use the information gleaned from these assessments?
- What type of feedback do you give to learners, and how do they use it?
- Do you ever ask students their opinions about assessment? If so, what do you do with the information?
- Do you consider yourself adequately trained for assessment? How did you feel when you first started assessing? How could you improve your work with assessment? What would you need for this?
- What sort of review or reflection processes do you have on assessment? Are these useful?
- Are learners ever given help, other than in the classroom, to prepare for assessment?
- What are your colleagues' attitudes to the process of moderation?
- What kind of practices would count as a wrong/(breach of ethics) in assessment?
- What kind of things could mean a college should no longer be accredited as an assessor/provider?
- How do you think continuous site-based assessment should be used?
- What kind of 'evidence' should you keep for your part in the assessment process?
- What kind of way should your assessment feedback be reported? Who should know the feedback?
- How would problems with assessment be picked up in your institution?
- Who do you report to and in what format?

Research Protocol for the case studies—assessors

- What is the main way in which learners in FET are assessed?
- Do you plan to keep it this way?
- What are the most difficult challenges for you as an assessor?
- What kind of support or capacity building do you get for these challenges? What (else) would help you?
- Have you had any kind of training?
- If you were to select assessors to work with you, what would you look for in new assessors? How are assessors currently selected? What training would you like to see them undergo?
- What keeps you going? (motivates you)
- What is needed to stay registered as an assessor? Should de-registration be possible?
- What sort of review or reflection process do you have as assessors? How do you use these?
- What sorts of internal moderation or peer review processes do you have?
- What kind of communication (if any) do you have with the lecturers and the students about assessment?
- What are your colleagues' attitudes to the process of moderation?
- What kind of information do you give to the moderator?
- What kind of feedback do you get from the moderator? What do you do with this feedback?
- What kind of communication do you have with the SETA ETQA or with Umalusi on assessment?
- Please talk about your understanding of the following terms: validity, reliability, fairness, transparency, standards, benchmarking.
- In what way do you take any of these into account in the examining?
- What do you do with the results of the assessments?
- Do you have anything to do with continuous assessment?
- Have you any example of a conflict or an appeal you could tell us about? What is the policy about conflicts on assessment?
- How do you try to ensure that you and your colleagues are producing quality in your work?
- What helps you to know what to do?
- What kind of 'evidence' should you keep for your part in the assessment process?
- Who should have access to this evidence?
- What kind of things could mean a college should no longer be accredited as an assessor/provider?
- What kind of practices would count as a wrong/(breach of ethics) in assessment?

- What could you do if you perceived there was a problem with the providers teaching and testing?
- What could happen if you disagreed with the moderator or external examiner?
- Who do you report to and in what format?

Research Protocol for the case studies—moderators

- Umalusi speaks about the moderator as the person who has to assure that the judgments of the examiners are valid, reliable, et cetera. How do you go about your work as moderator in this sector?
- How do you select from students' work or examiners' work? What in particular do you look for?
- What are the particular challenges for a moderator?
- What type of support do you get for these challenges?
- What kind of support or capacity development would you value to support your work?
- What kind of capacity is needed to remain a moderator? Should it be possible to be deregistered or discredited? Under what conditions?
- What sort of things do you discuss with the examiners or assessors?
- Do you have any communication with the ETQA, or with the verifier, or with Umalusi, and if so, what is the nature of this communication? (Conversations, reports, workshops?)
- Do you have any communication with other moderators? In what ways?
- How do you justify your decisions to other role players?
- Have you ever had an incident when an examiner hasn't accepted what you or your colleagues have said? If so, how was this dealt with?
- In what ways do the people you work with try to ensure that they are doing a good job?
- What helps you to know what to do?
- What kind of practices would count as a wrong/(breach of ethics) in assessment?
- How could you moderate continuous or site based assessment?
- What kind of 'evidence' should you keep for your part in the assessment process? Who should have access to this evidence?
- What could you do if you disagreed with the assessor, verifier or the ETQA? Has this ever happened?
- Who do you report to and in what format?
- What do you do with the results of the assessments? (probe: analysis, interpretation, feedback, reporting)

Research Protocol for the case studies—verifiers

- What sort of skills and attitudes do you think moderators should have?
- How would these link with the skills and attitudes needed by verifiers? How would you select verifiers to join you? What is the current selection process?
- Would you expect new verifiers to have had some training? If so, what is this currently, and what should it be? What capacity development is there for experienced verifiers? Should deregistration be possible? Under what conditions?
- Do your colleagues ever discuss the work they do as verifiers? If so, what is the nature of their discussions? Do these discussions ever feed in to plans?
- Who do you report to? In what form? (Check above, moderators and assessors, learners or peers)
- What information do you need for this part of the quality assurance process? How would you get this information? (probe: sampling etc)
- How would you justify your interpretations? How would you report these? What sort of evidence would you keep and have available for scrutiny?
- In what ways do you take into account validity?
- How do you and your colleagues aim to ensure quality in what you do?
- What helps you to know what to do?
- What kind of practices would count as a wrong/(breach of ethics) in assessment?
- What kind of things could mean a college should no longer be accredited as an assessor/provider?
- In what way do you think continuous and site-based assessment should be used?
- What kind of 'evidence' should you keep for your part in the assessment process? Who should have access to this evidence?
- What could/would you do if you found problems with assessment from assessment bodies or providers?
- What could you do if you disagreed with Umalusi or the moderators or assessors?
- What do you look at in terms of results? What would you like to look at? (prompt, trends)?

Research Protocol for the case studies—Umalusi

- What is Umalusi's understanding of the nature of judgement in assessment?
- What sort of communication do you have with people at the different parts of the assessment process (learners, educators, assessors, moderators, verifiers) and what is the nature of these communications?
- How is/will the vision of Umalusi communicated to people involved with assessment?
- What self-reflective or review processes are in place in Umalusi?
- What are the major challenges concerning good assessment practice?
- What kind of practices would count as a wrong/(breach of ethics) in assessment?
- Hypothetically, if you were obliged to abandon any current plans due to inadequate funds, and you had to argue for a simple approach, what would the 'bottom line' be for the spending of such limited funds?
- What counts as expertise in Umalusi? How do you quality assure your own expertise?
- If the purpose is to keep a focus on learning, in what way does Umalusi keep an eye on the learning context, relationships, etc? Whose responsibility would it be to undertake research on learners, both their view of assessment, as well as issues such as language?
- What is your view of external benchmarking?
- What is the relationship to industry assessment?
- If you chose to process raw results, under what circumstances would this be done, and with what purposes?
- What kind of 'evidence' should you keep for your part in the assessment process? Who should have access to these records?
- If a provider or assessor is keen to comply with policies but does not appear to have current capacity to do so, what would you do?
- What recourse would someone have if they considered your actions unjust

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please assist Umalusi, and fill in this questionnaire now. It can be returned to the address provided above, before the 30 April. If you would like to fill it in digitally, please send an email to the email addresses provided above, and they will send you a digital version of this document. Please note that all statements use the plural form; we are looking for what is, in your opinion, general practice. All information will be treated confidentially. Please make a mark in the appropriate column (no/yes/sometimes) and then, if possible, provide a comment on your choice, or reason for it. Also, please indicate in the comment column where you feel that constraints are of an institutional, national, or individual nature.
Some of the questions may not apply to you if you do not conduct your own assessments. For these questions please mark the column that says 'Does not apply to us.'

Position in college:
Sector:
Learning area:

	No	Yes	Some-times	Does not apply	Comment or reason for response
We use only written tests or examinations in assessment.					
We use a combination of methods of assessment.					
We assess our students' practical work.					
We have a system of continuous assessment.					
We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback only.					
We assess our students formatively, that is for the purpose of giving them feedback, but we also record their marks to use for promotion.					
Term marks count for the final mark (if yes, please say how much they count)					
We give only marks on assessments.					

	No	Yes	Some-times	Does not apply	Comment or reason for response
We give many types of feedback on assessments.					
We meet our students to discuss assessments.					
Our students assess themselves.					
Our students assess each other.					
We assess mainly facts or content.					
We assess content and skills (please say in the comments column approximately what percentage of the assessments test skills)					
We test values and attitudes.					
We discuss the assessments we set with our colleagues before the learners write.					
We do assessments set by an outside assessment body only.					
The assessors or those who are testing or marking the students discuss the tests and the way they are marking with each other.					
We identify students who may fail through an early assessment					
We provide support for 'at risk' students					
We help students to prepare for their assessments.					
We talk about whether our assessments test what we want them to test.					
We have a process of internal moderation of assessments before the learners get them.					

	No	Yes	Some-times	Does not apply	Comment or reason for response
We have a process of internal moderation of the marking itself.					
We have a process of internal moderation of marks or assessment results.					
We analyse learner marks as a group.					
We don't analyse marks. We record them.					
We report to a superior about our learners' marks.					
We are satisfied with a process of external moderation.					
We have practices of internal moderation.					
We have been trained as assessors.					
We have been accredited as assessors.					
We would welcome training/more training as assessors.					
We think it is important to compare results across institutions					
We would assess differently if we had more freedom to make our own choices (please give an indication of what you may do differently in the comments column)					
We would assess differently if we had more time (please give an indication of what you may do differently in the comments column)					
We think language makes written examinations less reliable					

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please feel free to add any other information or opinions in relation to the quality assurance of assessment of TVET programmes.