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**GOVERNMENT NOTICE**

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**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION****NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS ACT, 2008 (ACT 67 OF 2008)****GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF), 2012/13**

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, MP, hereby publish the *Guidelines on Strategy and Priorities for the National Qualifications Framework, 2012/13* in terms of section 8(2)(c) of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008.

The *Guidelines* give direction to the work of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Quality Councils during the coming period.

**DR BE NZIMANDE, MP****MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING****DATE:** 15/11/12

**Department of Higher Education and Training****NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK ACT, 2008 (ACT 67 OF 2008)****GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF), 2012/13****This document**

1. This document is the second in the series of Minister's *Guidelines* as required by section (2)(c) of the NQF Act. It sets out strategies and priorities for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and covers the period to 31 March 2013. It updates, builds on and augments the first *Guidelines* document (see Annexure) which covered the period to March 2012.
2. Over time the *Guidelines* will be aligned with the three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) cycle. This will ensure that the priority work of the NQF bodies is sufficiently funded, with realistic timeframes for implementation which take into account Ministerial and departmental processes.

**Strategic considerations**

3. The first *Guidelines* document outlines the strategic importance for our society and economy of a well-functioning education and training system. Since the first *Guidelines* were issued, both this Ministry's *Green Paper for Post School Education and Training* (January 2012) and the *National Development Plan 2030: Our Future—Make it Work* (November 2011) (NDP) have drawn attention to the serious imbalances, inequalities and shortages that persist in the provision of education and training at all levels and across all sectors. Both documents make bold proposals for better planning, targeted expansion and improved support services over the period to 2030 in order to progressively eliminate the worst deficits in provision.
4. The government is committed to expanding provision but expansion alone will not overcome “the lack of coherence within the post-school system as a whole, between basic education and the post-school system, and between the post-school system and

the labour market” (*Green Paper*, p. xii). The *Green Paper* rightly regards this as a central problem to be addressed. A well-functioning system achieves its designed outcomes only if its components inter-connect and inter-relate efficiently, working together for a common purpose. If the components of the education and training system are not functioning inter-dependently, then they hardly comprise a system at all, but a collection of poorly-related elements whose ability to deliver value to the society and economy is gravely impaired.

5. That is the reason why the creation of the post-school education and training system involves radical re-thinking on how the constituent components relate to one another. Since 1994 the democratic government has consistently enunciated and done its best to advance the principles of coherence amid diversity, flexibility and responsiveness, in order to remove artificial and regressive barriers to access and advance the widening of the scope of learning opportunities. The creation in 2009 of the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training signalled a renewed determination by the government to eliminate the institutionalised obstacles to access and progress in our learning system. Step by step the mechanisms of transition from school to post-school education and training and from education to work are being re-engineered, and the roles of all components of the system are being re-defined in order to achieve the greatest possible synergies. Synergy is the dynamic co-operation between elements to produce a result that exceeds what each of them could produce on its own. That is what the government is aiming for and every component of the system is implicated: schools, Community Education and Training Centres, FET colleges, universities, private providers, the National Skills Authority (NSA), Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and the NQF bodies.
6. Qualifications are the currency of the education and training system. A properly functioning qualifications framework is thus a vital mechanism for advancing the inter-dependence and achieving the common interests of the components of the system. The first democratic government, supported by a powerful coalition of stakeholder bodies, brought the NQF into being in order to serve the profoundly democratic purpose of eliminating racially-determined barriers to advancement in learning and the workplace. Race is no longer a legal impediment to advancement, but the structural legacy of racial discrimination still disfigures our education and training

system and therefore access to and progression within the skilled labour market. The NQF bodies, operating within their sphere of competence, still have much to do.

7. SAQA and the QCs are recognised in the *Green Paper* as important components of the regulatory system for education and training. The *Green Paper* gives serious attention to the roles that SAQA and the QCs should play in correcting dysfunctions, safeguarding quality and achieving excellence in the education and training system. Both the *Green Paper* and the NDP express the view that the current regulatory system of qualifications and quality assurance is complex and difficult to understand. Clearly the re-modelled and simplified institutional architecture introduced by the NQF Act, 2008 has not yet delivered a simpler, more accessible and coherent qualifications and quality assurance framework. This remains a fundamentally important challenge to which appropriate solutions must be found in the coming period.
  
8. The objectives of the NQF are familiar to all the NQF bodies but it is worth re-stating them because they have particular resonance at this time:
  - “(1) The objectives of the NQF are to:
    - (a) create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
    - (b) facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
    - (c) enhance the quality of education and training; and
    - (d) accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
  - “(2) The objectives of the NQF are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.
  - “(3) SAQA and the QCs must seek to achieve the objectives of the NQF by:
    - (a) developing, fostering and maintaining an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements;
    - (b) ensuring that South African qualifications meet appropriate criteria, determined by the Minister as contemplated in section 8, and are internationally comparable; and

- (c) ensuring that South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality.”  
(NQF Act, s. 5)

9. No doubt these objectives will remain valid whatever the precise shape the NQF bodies might take in future.

### **Priorities for the period to March 2013**

10. The priorities listed here are matters of particular importance in the current period. They represent a select number of activities and do not describe the full range of statutory functions for which SAQA and the QCs are responsible.
11. Good progress has been made in addressing the priorities listed in the previous *Guidelines*. Those that are incomplete remain priorities until they have been changed or concluded. Some of them re-appear in revised form in the current *Guidelines*.

### ***Sub-frameworks***

12. The learning, occupational and career path objectives of the NQF Act (ss. 5, 7) can be served only by an appropriately articulated qualifications framework. The previous *Guidelines* (para. 17) charged the QCs to advise on:
- 1) the essential character of each sub-framework;
  - 2) the demarcation between each sub-framework; and
  - 3) the basis on which sub-frameworks articulate with one another.

The NQF Act (s. 11) requires SAQA to “co-ordinate the sub-frameworks” and this responsibility is echoed in the *NQF Implementation Framework 2011-2015* (Priority 3). Co-ordination is a means to achieve simplicity, coherence and articulation in an “integrated and transparent framework” (see para. 8 above).

13. The Government Notice inviting public comment on the proposed sub-frameworks observed that “sufficient articulation” had not yet been achieved and invited the public to advise how this defect could be corrected (*Government Gazette*, No. 34883, 23 December 2011).

14. Preparing, consulting on and revising the sub-frameworks has taken a long time. Public and private providers and stakeholders are understandably anxious for the final determination. The Minister is required by the NQF Act, 2008 (s. 8(2)(e)) to determine the sub-frameworks after considering advice from SAQA. SAQA has been requested to provide such advice. In considering its advice SAQA is requested to consider the public comments on the proposed sub-frameworks and the Green Paper's NQF proposals because the *Green Paper* and sub-framework policy processes must themselves be aligned. The Minister's final determination of the sub-frameworks will take fully into account SAQA's advice and will also be consistent with the Ministry's evolving policy position on the NQF system.
15. SAQA is obliged (in terms of s. 36(b) of the NQF Act) to allocate every currently registered qualification to one of the three sub-frameworks and has put in place a process to do so. This is a major task, as was recognised in the previous *Guidelines* (para. 32). It will provide certainty about which QC is responsible for a qualification. SAQA must, as is customary, consult the QCs but the final decision is SAQA's to make. In some cases a provisional allocation may be appropriate pending the Minister's determination of the sub-frameworks.

### ***Policy and legislation***

16. The review of NQF policy and legislation which was discussed in the previous *Guidelines* (paras. 19-20) is being undertaken in conjunction with the discussions on the proposed sub-frameworks and the *Green Paper for Post School Education and Training*. Policy and legislative changes will continue to be considered in the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee and the Steering Committee will continue to consult with the NQF bodies on these matters through the CEO Committee (see para. 26 below).
17. It is now expected that the NQF policy, which is required in terms of s. 8(2)(b) of the NQF Act, will be enunciated in the forthcoming White Paper. Appropriate changes to NQF-related legislation will be introduced in the 2013 Parliamentary session.

***NQF implementation framework***

18. SAQA is required by the NQF Act (s. 13(1)(e)) “to oversee the implementation of the NQF in accordance with an implementation framework prepared by SAQA after consultation with the QCs”. SAQA has published the *NQF Implementation Framework 2011-2015*. This helpful document should be updated on an annual basis in order to take into account current developments and set new targets.
19. Since 2009 the oversight role played by SAQA as the apex body of the NQF system and the custodian of its values has become increasingly important. In addition to its statutorily prescribed functions SAQA has been required to take on complex new tasks, such as the development of the NQF and Career Advice Services and the verification of all public servants’ credentials. Such tasks are consistent with the objectives of the NQF and relate to SAQA’s core mandate. They are also very large and complex responsibilities and require specialist expertise and significant resources.
20. Because SAQA is at the head of the education and training quality management system there is a danger that it will continue to attract more responsibilities than it can handle without significant re-structuring. It is therefore prudent for SAQA to undertake and report on a scoping exercise to assess its current situation and future organisational trajectory. This should be done rather rapidly by internal monitoring, discussion in the CEO Committee and consultation with stakeholders. SAQA’s report will contribute to the NQF policy review process.

***Particularly urgent delivery requirements***

21. The previous *Guidelines* (paras. 31-35) established milestones for “the fundamental NQF components” of standards, quality assurance, progression and information. While considerable progress has been made some tasks must still be completed. The following issues are particularly important and urgent.
22. ***Standards vocabulary.*** It is desirable for SAQA’s and QCs’ policy on standards to clarify and bring consistency to the use of standards terminology in the NQF system. Terms like “curriculum”, “curriculum framework”, “National Curriculum and Assessment Statement”, “national core syllabus”, “programme”, “learning

programme”, “standards”, “unit standards”, “qualification” and “part qualification” are in use in legislation, regulations and policy documents. Some terms are defined in legislation while others are not. A standard glossary of terms seems indicated. Legislative amendments may then follow.

23. **Quality assurance.** The NQF Act (s. 27(i)) makes QCs responsible for developing and implementing quality assurance policy within their sub-frameworks, including ensuring its “integrity and credibility”. Both the NDP and the *Green Paper* express dissatisfaction with current quality assurance arrangements. A less bureaucratic and more robust, purposeful and focused system is required that will support public and private providers. If the integrity and credibility of the quality assurance system is indeed at risk, then SAQA must without delay work with the QCs to investigate the merits of the criticism and make an early report to the Ministry.
24. **Information security.** SAQA develops and manages the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD), which is a vital repository of both historic and current public and private information. The previous *Guidelines* advised that:

“Attention should be paid in the current period to the quality assurance of information processes; in particular to security and verification of source data on learner records.” (para. 35)

This remains a priority. In particular SAQA and the QCs must investigate whether all public and registered private providers are legally compelled to ensure the integrity, security and safe-keeping of their learners’ records and if not how the relevant laws should be tightened.

25. **Professional bodies.** Professional bodies are a recognised and valued component of the NQF system. SAQA has developed its *Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008* (June 2012). The processes of recognition and registration are now proceeding in a phased manner. These steps represent signal achievements in the development and regulation of the professions in South Africa. They have brought the professional bodies into a close working



relationship with SAQA and facilitated collaboration with the QCs on qualifications and quality assurance as the Act requires (s. 28).

26. Access to a professional (including an occupational) body is a necessary step in many career pathways. In terms of SAQA's criteria a recognised professional body may not engage in "unfair exclusionary practices" in admitting members or in recognising education and training providers (*Policy and Criteria*, para. 28(vii)). While outright race-based exclusion is now a thing of the past the public is entitled to know whether other measures are being employed to prevent or inhibit equal access by qualified practitioners to membership of professional bodies, and whether professional bodies are indeed mindful of their responsibility to widen the doors of opportunity for qualified practitioners from previously excluded or vulnerable groups. With this in mind, SAQA is requested to mount a research project, in collaboration with professional bodies, to investigate comparative admission practices among professional bodies and report its findings and recommendations.

### **Monitoring**

27. As before, SAQA is requested to monitor progress in the work associated with these priorities and give timely advice to the CEO Committee on issues that impede implementation.

### **Conclusion**

28. In consultation with the QCs, SAQA has developed and published a *System of Collaboration* to guide the mutual relations of the NQF bodies as required by the NQF Act (s. 13(1)(f)(i)). The preparation and implementation of this system has enabled the NQF bodies to overcome significant tensions and resolve divisive issues while building mutual trust and co-operative working practices. Its adaptability and strength has been demonstrated and will be tested again as the sub-frameworks are finalised and the new NQF policy takes shape in the White Paper process.
29. Close working relationships between the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Basic Education have been forged in the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has consultative

membership of the CEO Committee of NQF bodies. The mutual flow of information and efficient transaction of business in the CEO Committee is welcome. The NQF Forum of chairpersons and CEOs will meet annually or at the request of the Minister.

30. Collectively the NQF bodies have the responsibility to ensure that the NQF functions as an increasingly efficient system for widening learning opportunity in our country and guaranteeing the relevance, quality and international comparability of our qualifications.

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

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

**Strategic considerations**

6. Strengthening the nation's education, skills and human resource base is one of the government's highest priorities for the current period. This was declared in the President's State of the Nation address at the opening of Parliament on 3 June 2009. It was stated again in the government's *Medium-Term Strategic Framework, 2009-2014*, and re-iterated emphatically in the government's *New Growth Path: the Framework* (2010).

7. “Stepping up education and skills development” is programme four in the NGP’s development policy package for growth, decent work, and equity:

Improvements in education and skill levels are a fundamental prerequisite for achieving many of the goals in this growth path. General education must equip all South Africans to participate in our democracy and economy, and higher education must do more to meet the needs of broad-based development. The growth path also requires a radical review of the training system to address shortfalls in artisanal and technical skills.

8. The Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa addresses these goals, and the National Skills Development Strategy 3 focuses on meeting the particular shortfalls identified in the NGP for engineers, artisans, workplace skills, further education and training and ICT.
9. The creation of two dedicated departments for Basic Education and for Higher Education and Training respectively illustrates the government’s commitment to the delivery of its strategic education and skills objectives. The Performance Agreements signed with the President by the Ministers of Basic Education and of Higher Education and Training are fully aligned with government’s strategic priorities.
10. The achievement of the government’s strategic goals will be meaningful only if the quality of education and occupational skills is simultaneously elevated throughout the national learning system. The nation requires strong and well-functioning education institutions and occupational skills providers that provide access to credible, quality assured qualifications.
11. The National Qualifications Framework, which was a major initiative of the Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994, is South Africa’s chosen mechanism for setting appropriate and rigorous standards for qualifications and quality assurance and for widening access to education and occupational opportunities.
12. From the outset the NQF has been a national project with developmental objectives that relies on social dialogue and is driven by thousands of engaged stakeholders and specialists across all social and economic sectors. The 2007 Joint Policy Statement

(JPS) on “Enhancing the Efficacy and Efficiency of the National Qualifications Framework” issued by the Ministers of Education and Labour observed that,

“Since 1995, the National Qualifications Framework has become an essential instrument in the construction of a high quality, responsive South African education, training and skills development system that serves our democracy and social and economic development.”

13. The NQF Act, 2008 embodies the policy set out in the JPS and re-models the NQF institutional landscape to achieve greater efficacy and efficiency in the management of a high-quality, responsive, developmental national qualifications system.
14. SAQA and the three QCs are therefore well positioned by history, experience and mandate to ensure that the NQF succeeds. They have signalled their commitment by signing the National Skills Summit Declaration of 10 September 2010.

#### **Priorities for the period to 31 March 2013**

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

#### ***Underlying priorities***

16. Two priorities underlie all others in the period to March 2013.
17. The first is the need for the Minister to determine the three sub-frameworks on SAQA’s advice according to the letter and spirit of the NQF Act, 2008. This requires each QC to finalise the development (or, in the case of the Council on Higher Education, the revision) of its sub-framework in coordination with the other QCs. The articulation between Further Education and Training, Higher Education and Occupational qualifications is particularly vital for the government’s programme. The QCs need to advise on:
  - 1) the essential character of each sub-framework;
  - 2) the demarcation between each sub-framework; and
  - 3) the basis on which sub-frameworks articulate with one another.

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

### ***Managing transition***

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

### ***System of collaboration***

22. The system of collaboration is a fundamental requirement of the new NQF arrangements for which SAQA is responsible (NQF Act, 2008, s. 13(1)(f)(i)). The system of collaboration will guide mutual relations among SAQA and the QCs. It must also take into account the Regulations for Resolving a Dispute in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Government Notice No. R.743 of 27 August 2010). The regulations require collegial action to prevent or minimise the effect of disputes among SAQA and the QCs. They also ensure that any dispute is settled quickly in order to avoid unnecessary damage to the NQF project.

23. The NQF Forum and its CEO Committee are a core element of the system of collaboration. They must continue as forums for frank discussion; for consultation on joint actions, overlapping responsibilities and potential disagreements; for collective agreement on important aspects of NQF implementation; and for mutual accountability.
24. The system of collaboration should be reflected in a document which SAQA updates from time to time in the light of experience.

### *NQF implementation framework*

25. The completion of the implementation framework is another urgent requirement of the NQF Act. The Act requires SAQA to prepare the framework after consultation with the QCs (s. 13(1)(e)). The framework is the basis on which SAQA fulfils its responsibility to oversee the implementation of the NQF. Mechanisms, dates, broad resource and capacity requirements and lines of accountability must be specified.
26. The transitional arrangements contemplated in section 36 of the NQF Act, 2008 and section 6 of Schedule 2A of the Skills Development Act, 2008 must become redundant as soon as practically possible. The implementation framework should identify the processes by which that will happen.
27. While all the NQF bodies are in the process of adjusting organisational structures, personnel establishments and budgets to the demands of the new legislation, the QCTO is in the unique position of having to create its structures, recruit its staff (including its CEO), achieve financial viability and perform its statutory functions almost from scratch. The implementation framework should give particular attention to the processes by which the QCTO will assume its position as a fully self-managing QC.
28. The framework should provide for continuity of service to all NQF stakeholders and clients during the transition period and ensure that accurate and timely information about the transition is made available to all NQF stakeholders and clients.

29. The implementation framework should explain by what mechanisms SAQA will oversee the implementation of the NQF, bearing in mind the respective statutory powers of SAQA and the QCs and the system of collaboration. Particular attention should be paid to the mechanisms required to coordinate the three sub-frameworks of the NQF.
30. How QCs intend to manage their standard setting and quality assurance processes should be treated as a priority in the NQF implementation framework.

***Particularly urgent delivery requirements***

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



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33. The new quality assurance arrangements should be completed and put into operation. Where this has not been done, the QCs must develop and implement policy and criteria for quality assurance within their respective sub-frameworks. Where necessary, delegations by QCs to competent quality assurance bodies must be developed and put into operation.
  34. The new progression arrangements for learners should be completed and put into operation. Mechanisms for ensuring that competent learners and workers are able to progress within the learning system and along their chosen career paths are particularly important if the national human resource development priorities are to be met. This will require system-wide articulation and equivalence arrangements to be put in place. Policy and criteria for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer also have strategic importance and must be given appropriate priority.
  35. The information arrangements are of vital strategic importance to the whole NQF system and have equal priority with the others. Attention should be paid in the current period to the quality assurance of information processes; in particular to security and verification of source data on learner records. The necessity for timely and accurate information to be made available to stakeholders and the public, especially on transitional arrangements, needs renewed emphasis. The national careers advisory service is a new information initiative entrusted by government to the NQF system which has very high value to the post-school constituency.

### **Monitoring**

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