GOVERNMENT NOTICE

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK ACT, 2008 (Act 67 of 2008)

GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF), 2015/16

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, hereby publish *Guidelines on Strategy and Priorities for the National Qualifications Framework, 2015/16* 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: 17/04/2015

MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) 2015/2016

This Document

1. This *Ministerial Guideline 2015/2016* document sets the tone for focused implementation of the National Qualifications Act, Act no. 67 of 2008 in this period. The Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Quality Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI). Strategically, there are two core foci for this period: The further development and implementation of the NQF; and submission of concrete strategies and initial implementation of the policy intentions envisaged in the White paper for Post-school Education and Training (WP PSET).

2. Whilst the previous three *Guideline* documents allowed sufficient time to deal with the transition between the SAQA Act, No. 98 of 1995 and the NQF Act, No. 67 of 2008, this *Guideline* will prioritize implementation across the education and training system, especially in key areas which will address what I perceive to be gaps in the quality assurance regime in South Africa. These areas will have a budget implication for SAQA and the QCs and therefore early notice is important to enable funding to be allocated to initiate the programmes I will present in this Guideline.

3. The functions of policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and governance compliance and reporting remain items about which SAQA and the QCs will continue to report to me quarterly and in a consolidated annual report.

4. Progress in the areas for development, establishment and implementation which SAQA and the QCs must perform in terms of the WP PSET must be reported in the quarterly and annual reports. I will elaborate on these issues in this *Guideline* document.

5. Progress reports about further development and implementation of articulation, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), credit accumulation and transfer (CAT), recognition of professional bodies and registration of professional designations remain an integral part of the reports which I receive from SAQA and the QCs. These progress reports should comprise quantitative and qualitative reporting with clear and unambiguous data from which I can derive information about the progress being made in terms of implementing the NQF Act.

6. It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the following:

    a. The good work being done through the Chief Executive Officers' (CEO) Committee.

    b. The progress being made in terms of learning that does not lead to a qualification.

    c. The progress being made to deepen and widen implementation of RPL across the education and training system.

    d. The smooth transition and hand over of the Career Advisory Services (CAS) project from SAQA to my Career Development Services (CDS) Directorate.

    e. The on-going positive partnerships with international counterparts and other countries.

Strategic considerations

7. The President of South Africa and numerous Ministers in his Cabinet have pointed to radical developments which are needed in the next years to ensure maximum and effective delivery on all fronts. We have to ensure that the NQF Act and all of its component sections are implemented. This means that qualifications and part qualifications which are registered on the NQF are relevant to a diverse and changing world of work and social and community needs. The quality of delivery has to be improved, so that many more people of all ages graduate and are sought after for employment or can establish sustainable entrepreneurial ventures. Also, that they are equipped to play a meaningful role in society.

8. The growth of the economy, society and communities is vital. The demand for skilled, knowledgeable and innovative people who can contribute to the social and economic development of the nation at large is a key driver of our strategies in this department. To do this, we have to ensure that credible institutions deliver relevant and quality qualifications, which lead to career pathways enabled through a robust and sensible articulation system. We have to provide RPL routes for those who need their knowledge, skills and competence to be recognized however obtained, especially when valid and credible RPL policies and processes exist to do this.

9. This department has a key role to play in partnership with other Government departments and stakeholders in addressing the Millennium Development Goals of *Education for All* and *Decent Work for All.* In our successful Nelson Mandela Careers Festival which was held from 15 to 18 July 2014 at the Sedibeng Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

College, we were reminded of the untapped potential that waits to be released as thousands of energetic and enthusiastic young people study, graduate and are ready to enter the world of work.

10. The WP PSET represents this Department's thinking in line with the country's key national policy documents including the National Development Plan (NDP), the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan and the draft Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa. The WP PSET is a vehicle with which to drive and deepen transformation of the entire post-schooling sector using the mechanisms put into place through SAQA, and the three QCs.

11. This Department has progressed steadily in further development of the Career development Services (CDS) and Central Applications System (CAS). Both these initiatives rely on the work done by SAQA and the QCs in registering quality qualifications, addressing articulation issues and RPL.

12. This Department has full responsibility for the TVET Colleges and the Community Education and Training Centres (CETs), and function shift was finalized on 1 April 2015. I encourage SAQA and the QCs to work with my Department to begin to simplify and demystify the NQF, and support the strengthening of the CDS and CAS programmes, and TVET Colleges and CETs. In other words, the NQF must become a living and useful artefact in the lives of all South Africans and every place of employment, teaching and learning.

Priorities for the period to March 2016

Progress in implementation of the WP PSET.

13. Quarterly reports must be provided to me with quantitative and qualitative updates about progress towards implementation of the proposals contained in the WP PSET. These reports must speak to:
    a. What is happening to simplify the NQF?
    b. What are the remaining obstacles to articulation that must be overcome?
    c. The provision of support and guidance to institutions to incrementally incorporate RPL, articulation and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) as they do their academic planning for 2016/2017.
    d. The implementation of RPL across the education and training system.

e. Qualifications development and registration, recognition of professional bodies, and the quality assurance responsibilities of the QCs.

14. Each of these priorities requires SAQA's overarching leadership, as well as the direct involvement of the CHE, QCTO and Umalusi.

Recording, Verification and Quality Assurance of learner records

15. The SAQA Act, Act No. 98 of 1995 was promulgated, which provided the legislative framework for the development of the NQF. The NQF Act, No. 67 of 2008, which replaced the SAQA Act, provides new impetus to the further development and implementation of the NQF. Between 1995 to the present, work has been done to develop and implement a well-functioning and credible South African NQF. What needs to happen urgently is for SAQA, in collaboration with the QCs, to obtain records of all student and learner achievements prior to and post 1994 that have not yet been recorded on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). It is important to ensure that all learners' records are captured and available on the NLRD, as per Section 13 (I) of the NQF Act.

16. Similarly, the recording of all credit-bearing short courses and skills programmes and the learners' achievements (registered by the SETAs with the Department of Labour) must be recorded on the NLRD.

17. Prior to 1994 there were at least 17 different education departments which were divided based on race, political and geographical considerations. The recording of learners' qualifications and achievements from that time was unequal and has emerged as a challenge. In the absence of correctly recorded learner records, it becomes very difficult for job seekers to produce evidence of their previous achievements, especially when these have been lost or damaged. Employers find it difficult to verify qualifications when these are not recorded on the NLRD. Recording of all learner records, in partnership with the Quality Councils and other role-players which provide data, is also a way of combatting fraudulent qualifications.

18. SAQA has been working in partnership with the quality councils to record learner achievements and through which all paper records of qualifications will be recorded. There is a need for focus to be placed on strengthening of the partnerships between SAQA and the three QCs to work with other stakeholders such as Higher Education South Africa (HESA), the DHET's examinations Chief Directorate, the National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB) and the Sector Education and Training Authorities ((SETAs) - through the QCTO mechanism) to obtain data from these partners for recording on the NLRD.

19. It is recognized that the scope and scale of this task is very large, and that there will be multi-layers in the further development and implementation of this programme. It is envisaged that there will be key phases in the project, which will include research, information sharing, resource procurement, systems development and support to all education and training providers and departments of education in the provinces, to trace and record data in a format required by the SAQA for the NLRD.

20. SAQA received an amount from Treasury to apply to the verification of employee qualifications project, and SAQA is requested to utilize the funds provided for the project to this end. The verification of qualifications resides in the overarching quality assurance role that SAQA performs. By ensuring that learners' achievements are recorded, and working consistently with partners to do this, will enhance the success of the verification project.

21. I request SAQA in consultation with the QCs to provide me with a strategy for the further development of both the verification and recording of learner achievements programmes, within three months of the new financial year 2015/2016 and to provide me with a NLRD progress report at the end of the 2015/2016 financial year.

Establishment and operationalization of a Fraud Unit

22. SAQA is tasked to keep a register of misrepresented or invalid qualifications which will be reported to me every two months. The QCs must work in partnership with SAQA to ensure that all instances of misrepresented or invalid qualifications are recorded and submitted to SAQA.

23. The QCs will be required to conduct rigorous monitoring and evaluation as part of their quality assurance function, and be guided by SAQA as to how to identify and report misrepresented or invalid qualifications to SAQA. SAQA must report misrepresented or invalid qualifications to DHET.

24. The QCs have a direct and key role to play in ensuring that fraudulent practices by providers of education and training are dealt with and reported to DHET.

25. SAQA envisaged establishing a fraud unit as part of its Directorate for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications in 2014/2015. However it is also apparent that misrepresented or invalid qualifications and fraudulent practices by unscrupulous non-registered and non-accredited education and training providers are also phenomena which occur in South Africa and must be dealt with immediately. The establishment of the register which records

misrepresented or invalid qualifications is already an important mechanism to record and report cases of fraud, and from which reports can be drawn and submitted.

26. The QCs must collaborate with SAQA to achieve the purposes of the fraud unit. The fraud unit will work collaboratively with DHET, the three Quality Councils (QCs), South African Police Services (SAPS) and the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). SAQA must provide me with consolidated reports every of all cases of institutional or qualification fraud which have been dealt with or reported pending further action, every two months.

27. It will be incumbent on SAQA, and the QCs to set aside funds from their voted budget, to support this activity as a point of focus within their quality assurance mandated function.

Conclusion

28. As stated earlier in these *Guidelines*, the focus of this document is on implementation of the NQF Act and the WP PSET. The WP PSET remains the guiding policy framework for SAQA and the QCs through which they must devise work plans and strategies to implement the proposals contained therein.

29. Of specific importance will be the further development and implementation of RPL, articulation practices, support to the TVET system, education and training institutions, and teaching staff. The registration of quality qualifications and part qualifications on the NQF remains a core area of delivery, as well as robust quality assurance systems implemented by the QCs.

30. Of particular importance will be the development and registration of credible, relevant and valid qualifications and part qualifications in the TVET system with clear articulation pathways for learners exiting the TVET system into either further learning or work.

31. We must not lose sight of the fact that service delivery in our areas of legislated competence remains essential, and through dedicated and committed partnerships we must meet the expectations of the South African learning public, for quality qualifications which will lead to employment, job creation and social and economic growth.