

## NOTICE 1037 OF 2013

# National Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer

**Draft for Public Comment**  
**15 October 2013**

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## Introductory note

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act 67 of 2008) requires that the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) develops Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). The attached draft policy has been developed by SAQA in close consultation with a CAT Reference Group (a list of the members can be found at the end of the policy).

CAT involves a range of related practices that are in many cases not explicitly defined as “CAT”. Examples include the work of admission committees in higher education, allocation of credits through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), advanced standing, credit transfer, mapping articulation between qualifications and courses, and many others. SAQA encourages all practitioners that are directly or indirectly involved in CAT practices to engage with this draft policy and submit comments to SAQA within 45 days of the publication of this draft policy in the Government Gazette. Comments should be sent to:

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This draft policy and criteria draws on several prior initiatives, including research into CAT models conducted by SAQA in 2006 (see the SAQA Bulletin Vol. 9[2]) and 2010; an Umalusi discussion document on CAT (2010); the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) articulation conference report (2012); as well as a range of relevant local and international publications such as: Butler and Hope (2000); European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDFEOP) (2013); Perold, Cloete and Papier (2012); Victoria Qualifications Authority (2003 and 2004); Laitinen (2012); Australia Department of Education, Science and Training (2006); Engineering Council of South Africa (2009); Nel (2006); Vickers (2013). In addition to the available literature, this policy draws on existing good practices identified in South Africa. These practices have been

investigated and documented through the NQF research conference held in February 2013.

This is the first time that national CAT policy and criteria is developed within South Africa. The conceptual model on which the policy draws will be further strengthened through the implementation of this policy and further research. Despite this limitation SAQA is of the view that this CAT policy and criteria provides an important benchmark that will have a positive impact on the education and training system by putting in place nationally agreed principles.

The core of the CAT model proposed in this policy and criteria is based on two approaches embedded within the South African NQF: (1) a description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes in relation to the level descriptors of the NQF; and (2) the allocation of credits for the achievement of learning outcomes.

The CAT model described within this policy and criteria is of a reforming nature: while it draws on existing good practices, it also provides a strong impetus for change across various sectors where CAT remains limited. The policy and criteria provides a set of broad principles for CAT as well as specific roles for SAQA, the Quality Councils, education institutions, skills development providers, professional bodies and workplaces. An important feature of this CAT model is an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. In this regard the policy and criteria provides clarity on the features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer as they can be implemented within the South African context.

SAQA looks forward to working with the Quality Councils and a broad range of stakeholders to refine this policy and criteria.

Joe Samuels

Chief Executive Officer

## Glossary of terms

“Advanced standing” means the status granted to a learner for admission to studies at a level higher than the learner’s prior formal studies would have allowed, and includes exemption where applicable.

“Apprenticeship” means a learning programme in respect of an officially listed trade, which includes a trade-test in respect of that trade, and leads to a qualification registered on the NQF.

“Articulation” means the process of forming possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part qualifications to allow for the movement of learners through the formal education and training system and its linkages with the world of work.

“Comparability” means the degree of similarity between two qualifications in terms of purpose, level, credits and learning outcomes in order to determine the extent of credit accumulation and/ or transfer within or between institutions.

“Credit” means a measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification or part qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for the qualification or part qualification. One credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.

“Credit accumulation” means the totalling of credits required to complete a qualification or a part qualification.

“Credit matrix” means a system in which learning outcomes can be arranged and compared in levels of increased complexity based on agreed groupings of credits, such as in modules or part qualifications.

“Credit transfer” means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal transfer of credits towards a qualification or part qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions.

“Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system” means an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

“Curriculum” means the underpinning policy provided for a qualification or part qualification to facilitate a more general understanding of its implementation in an educational system.

“Formal learning” means learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such. Formal learning leads to the awarding of a qualification or part qualification registered on the NQF.

“Informal learning” means learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure, including incidental learning.

“Internship” means structured work experience that is undertaken during or after formal studies.

“Learnership” means a learning programme registered with the DHET which consists of a structured learning component, a practical work experience component of a specified nature and duration and which leads to a qualification registered on the NQF and which is related to an occupation.

“Level descriptor” means a statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the NQF that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

“Learning programme” means a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification.

“Lifelong learning” means learning that takes place in all contexts in life from a life-wide, life-deep and lifelong perspective. It includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and competencies for personal growth, social and economic well-being, democratic citizenship, cultural identity and employability.

“National Qualifications Framework (NQF)” means a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications.

“NQF Act” means the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act No. 67 of 2008.

“Non-formal learning” means planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to awarding of qualifications or part qualifications.

“Notional hour” means the agreed estimate of the learning time that it would take an average learner to meet the defined learning outcomes; it includes consideration of contact time, research, completion of assignments, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, individual learning and assessment. Ten (10) notional hours equate to one (1) credit.

“Part qualification” means an assessed unit of learning that is registered as part of a qualification.

“Provider” means an entity that offers any learning programme that leads to a qualification or part qualification registered on the NQF.

“Professional body” means any body of expert practitioners in an occupational field, and includes an occupational body.

“Professional designation” means a title or status conferred by a professional body in recognition of a person’s expertise and/ or right to practice in an occupational field.

“Qualification” means a registered national qualification.

“Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)” means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development.

“Residency clause” means the rule that emanates from the Joint Statutes (Section 18, 1955) that sets a limit to the number of credits that may be transferred towards a qualification by a higher education institution, or between higher education institutions, in order to comply with certification requirements with funding implications.

“Skills programme” means a learning programme that is occupationally based and which, when completed, may constitute credits towards a qualification registered on the NQF.

“Work experience” means exposure and interactions gained through being in the workplace.

“Workplace-based learning” means the exposure and interactions required to practise the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes required in the workplace.

## Preamble

1. This Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) provides for the implementation of CAT within the context of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 within South Africa.
2. This Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) is an enabling policy that is closely related to the revised South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) *National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)* (2013) and the revised SAQA *National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications, Part qualifications and Professional Designations* (currently being developed). The three policies have been developed in an integrated manner to draw on a common conceptual basis and strengthen the interrelationships between Assessment, RPL and CAT.
3. The policy and criteria is located within the broader context of the Human Resource Development Strategy, the National Skills Development Strategy, and the National Development Plan 2030.
4. The policy and criteria is premised on the notion that social transformation in a developmental state such as South Africa can be achieved in part through well-articulated qualifications within an NQF that has a clearly defined policy on CAT.

## Scope

5. This policy and criteria applies to:
  - a) SAQA, Quality Councils, education institutions and skills development providers, workplaces, recognised professional bodies, and workplaces.
  - b) All qualifications, part qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF and offered in South Africa.
6. The specific context of each Quality Council and its sub-framework must be considered in the interpretation of this policy and criteria.

**Purpose**

7. The purpose of this policy and criteria is to facilitate the development of credible, efficient and transparent CAT processes within and between each of the sub-frameworks of the NQF.

**Objectives**

8. The objectives of this national policy and criteria for CAT are to:
  - a) Provide for the development and implementation of CAT as an integral component of qualification design within the NQF and its sub-frameworks.
  - b) Position CAT in relation to the objectives of the NQF to support lifelong learning in South Africa.
  - c) Directly address CAT related challenges faced within the education and training system, such as the need for a more diverse and differentiated post-school system, unfair exclusionary practices, mainstreaming of RPL, articulation of schooling and college qualifications, and the recognition of worker education and workplace learning.
  - d) Specify the roles and functions of SAQA, the Quality Councils, education institutions and skills development providers, recognised professional bodies and workplaces in relation to CAT.

**Credit Accumulation and Transfer in the context of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa**

9. The NQF in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, co-ordination, registration, and publication of articulated and quality-assured national qualifications and part qualifications. It was established under the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995). It continues under the NQF Act (Act 67 of 2008), which came into effect on 1 June 2009.
10. The NQF, as an integrated framework overseen by SAQA is made up of three coordinated sub-frameworks, each overseen by a Quality Council that needs to provide for RPL:
  - a) Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education,

- b) General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi, and
- c) Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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 of the NQF Act (Act 67 of 2008), and are internationally comparable; and
- c) Ensuring that South African Qualifications are of an acceptable quality.

## Principles

14. This policy and criteria for CAT is based on the following principles:

- a) *Access with success*  
Institutions and providers should facilitate the bridging of theory and/or practice components that are identified as weaknesses during admission and RPL processes.
- b) *Appropriateness and applicability*  
The comparison of qualifications must take into account the purpose of each qualification as well as the broader application of the qualifications within the context they were designed. The degree of similarity between qualifications will ensure that

students have the necessary knowledge and background to be successful in more advanced courses.

*c) Articulation by design*

All individual institutions and providers should include pathways for articulation in the design of new qualifications and part qualifications, and that these pathways should be widely publicised to existing students and potential applicants. It should furthermore be clear how these pathways connect with the world of work.

*d) Credible methods*

Qualifications must be compared based on credible methods that determine the extent to which their curricular properties, as well as their content and outcomes match as guided by the NQF level descriptors.

*e) Efficiency and efficacy*

Where a large volume of credit transfers must be established and articulation agreements already exist, appropriate and efficient methods should be used to avoid unnecessarily lengthy assessments of comparability.

*f) Equal valuing of learning outcomes achieved through different routes*

The equal value of similar learning outcomes achieved through formal, non-formal and/or informal learning must be promoted.

*g) Equity and inclusiveness*

Arrangements for articulation should benefit learners entering qualifications with credit transfer, as well as those students who enter directly without credits for prior learning.

*h) Parity of esteem*

Promoting parity requires the ability and commitment to communicate diplomatically, offering constructive suggestions, avoiding dictating terms, and providing justification where articulation cannot happen.

*i) Supplementation*

Where there are differences in prerequisites, the rigour of the curriculum, or the topics covered, an institution may require the learner from another institution to do supplementary work before credits are awarded. This supplementary work must be determined



in a fair, consistent and transparent manner, using credible methods, and in consultation between the two institutions.

j) *Transparency*

Quality assurance practices which include assessment and moderation must be open to scrutiny. Rules, regulations and any register of precedents which inform, influence or govern decisions taken in respect to articulation should be transparent and publicly available to intending students prior to enrolment. This should include transparent information related to fees for CAT where they are charged.

### **Credit Accumulation and Transfer practice in South Africa**

15. The context for CAT is the NQF which is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister for the *articulation* of quality assured national qualifications in South Africa.

16. Articulation within the NQF is both systemic and specific:

- a) Systemic articulation is based on legislation, national policy and formal requirements, including within and between the sub-frameworks of the NQF, and the steering mechanisms available to the State such as funding and planning within the education and training system; and
- b) Specific articulation is based on formal and informal agreements within the educational and training system, mostly between two or more education and training sub-systems, between specific institutional types, and guided by guidelines, policies, and accreditation principles.

17. The development of pathways for articulation during the design of new qualifications and part qualifications contributes to effective CAT.

18. Credit within the context of the NQF is a measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification or part qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for the qualification or part qualification. One credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.

19. Credit accumulation is the totalling of credits required to complete a qualification or a part qualification.

20. Credit accumulation can take place in the following forms:

- a) Intra-institutional – the totalling of credits within a specific institution, or department within an institution
- b) Inter-institutional – the recognition and accumulation of credits between two or more institutions
- c) National - the recognition and accumulation of credits across all institutions within South Africa

21. Systemic and specific articulation allows for credit accumulation within institutions in order to gain admission to, or be granted advanced standing, towards the completion of a qualification or a part qualification as determined by institutional policies.

22. Credit transfer means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal transfer of credits towards a qualification or part qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions.

23. Credit transfer can take place in the following forms:

- a) Block – credit guaranteed by an institution on commencement of a qualification based on previous study and specific articulation agreements
- b) Specified – credits transferred within or between institutions for similar components between qualifications based on a comparison of the qualifications
- c) Unspecified – credits transferred within or between institutions between qualifications which are not necessarily similar but which are deemed relevant to the purpose of the qualification

24. The exemption by an institution of part of a qualification with the right to advance (advanced standing) does not constitute credit transfer but will contribute to improved articulation.

25. Systemic and specific articulation also allows for the vertical, horizontal or diagonal transfer of credits between institutions in order to gain admission to, or be granted advanced standing towards, the completion of a qualification or part qualification on the same or a different level.

26. CAT is an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer, including the different forms of credit, are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

27. The comparison of qualifications for the purpose of CAT must be based on accepted and credible methods to determine the transferability of credits, including the following where relevant and feasible:
- a) Triangulation.
  - b) Equal value ascribed to similar learning outcomes achieved through the promotion of formal, non-formal and/or informal learning.
  - c) Development of a competency matrix.
  - d) Comparison of the purposes of the qualifications and learning outcomes.
  - e) Horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment and forms of assessment.
28. The bridging of theory and/or practice components that are identified as weaknesses during admission processes, including RPL, must be addressed by relevant providers.
29. A credit matrix is a system in which learning outcomes can be arranged and compared in levels of increased complexity based on agreed groupings of credits, such as in modules or part qualifications. The NQF, through the level descriptors, provides a basis for credit matrices that can be developed by specific sub-frameworks or sectors.

### **Policy priorities for Credit Accumulation and Transfer**

30. CAT has been prioritised in South Africa to promote articulation between qualifications across the three sub-frameworks of the NQF in order to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. The following are the main areas of prioritisation for CAT:
31. Effective delivery and design of articulation routes
- a) The intentional design of structure and content of qualifications must facilitate the continual progress and mobility of learners within and across each of the three sub-frameworks and to the world of work as set out in the *SAQA Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part qualifications on the NQF*.
  - b) Collaboration between providers from different sectors should take place to develop cross-sector qualifications linkages, advance specific articulation and CAT.
  - c) Guidelines must be developed to guide collaboration, including multilateral agreements, on a systemic level to advance reciprocity.

- d) Parity of esteem between qualifications located in different sub-frameworks must be promoted through the development of career pathways, effective communication and advocacy.
- e) Models of good practice relating to CAT must be documented, made available to the research community and used as a basis for the further development of CAT.
- f) Career advice services must provide guidance on career pathways and articulation routes.
- g) The residency clause must be correctly interpreted and consistently applied to expedite learner mobility and not to limit CAT.

### 32. Credible quality assurance and standards setting arrangements

- a) Credible and coordinated quality assurance arrangements must form the basis for CAT across all sectors.
- b) Improved trust between institutions and sectors must be facilitated through transparent processes that are open to scrutiny.
- c) New qualifications must be introduced in a considered manner to allow sufficient time for the public, workplaces and other stakeholders to become familiar with them.
- d) The recognition of workplace experience for CAT must be actively promoted in collaboration between the Quality Councils and workplaces.
- e) Specific attention must be paid to Levels 5 and 6 in the HEQSF and OQSF as a critical level where diverse options for CAT must be developed.
- f) The standards setting systems developed and overseen by the Quality Councils must provide an enabling framework within which appropriate arrangements for CAT may be developed.
- g) Integrated assessments, including final external integrated summative assessments for trade tests, should support CAT.

### 33. Adequate resourcing

- a) National funding and planning arrangements, including the residency clause in the context of higher education, must facilitate and support CAT.
- b) Funding arrangements for collaborative partnerships relating to the development of CAT schemes must be sourced and made available.
- c) The sustainability of CAT within and between institutions must be based on mutual consensus and reciprocity.

## **Responsibilities for the implementation of Credit Accumulation and Transfer**

34. The implementation and development of CAT is the joint responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training, the Department of Basic Education, SAQA, the QCs, education institutions and skills development providers, recognised professional bodies and workplaces. Specific responsibilities of each contributor are outlined below.

### **35. Responsibilities of SAQA:**

- a) Develop national policy and criteria, after consultation with the Quality Councils, for CAT.
- b) Develop national CAT guidelines for inter-institutional collaboration specifically on Levels 5 and 6 of the NQF and cross-sector qualifications linkages, after consultation with the Quality Councils and other stakeholders.
- c) Support the development of collaborative partnerships across the sub-frameworks of the NQF.
- d) Coordinate the sub-frameworks of the NQF, including the alignment of sub-framework policies on CAT, and articulation across the system.
- e) Establish and manage an adjudication process to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT.
- f) Set up and provide support to a permanent sub-committee of the CEO Committee for CAT.
- g) Oversee research to improve CAT in collaboration with the Quality Councils. Specific focus should be placed on existing partnerships and models of good practice relating to CAT, and national studies to improve outcomes in CAT within and between the sub-frameworks of the NQF.
- h) Promote and enable the use of a common language to communicate credit system arrangements.

### **36. Responsibilities of the Quality Councils:**

- a) Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this policy.
- b) Collaborate with the other QCs to ensure that effective CAT takes place within and across the three sub-frameworks.
- c) Formalise principles and conditions for CAT that guide the development of articulation agreements within their specific sub-frameworks.

- d) Initiate and oversee incubation projects within their specific sub-frameworks to strengthen the conceptual understanding of CAT and promote good practices.
- e) Develop a policy on CAT for their sub-frameworks, taking into account the relevant national SAQA policies, and the broader context of their specific sub-frameworks and related policies.
- f) Participate in the adjudication process of SAQA to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT within their specific sub-frameworks.
- g) Undertake systematic work on the development of sectoral credit schemes within their specific sub-frameworks.
- h) Promote the collaborative development of curriculum and qualification pathways between different institutional types to promote CAT.
- i) Actively promote the recognition of workplace experience for CAT in collaboration with workplaces.
- j) Develop linkages for articulation and progression to promote CAT within their sub-frameworks, including:
  - Formal articulation agreements among institutions
  - Coordinated quality assurance systems
  - Careful alignment of curricula in common fields, taking into account their purpose and the types of knowledge and competencies that they seek to develop
  - Curriculum review and extension
  - Bridging programmes
  - Formation of 'federations' or regional consortia of linked institutions

37. Responsibilities of education institutions and skills development providers:

- a) Implement the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this policy to ensure that equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities are possible.
- b) Demonstrate through regular internal and external quality audits, including those done by the Quality Councils, that their policies and practices for all types of articulation support the principles as listed in this policy.
- c) Seek accreditation by the relevant Quality Council(s).
- d) In the case of private education providers that offer qualifications and part qualifications located in the Higher Education and General and Further Education and Training sub-frameworks, registration

with either the Department of Higher Education and Training or the Department of Basic Education, respectively, is also required;<sup>1</sup>

- e) Avoid unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT.
- f) Collaborate to offer diverse and mutually recognised qualifications, specifically on Levels 5 and 6 of the NQF, through formal articulation agreements and in regional consortia where relevant.
- g) Set fair and transparent admission criteria that is consistent with national policy.
- h) Undertake collaborative approaches to curriculum development across different institutional types to advance CAT.
- i) Initiate and participate in partnerships with education and training providers to promote CAT.
- j) Develop and maintain an information management system that is compatible with the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) and other relevant government information management systems, and submit the relevant data to SAQA.

### 38. Responsibilities of recognised professional bodies:

- a) Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this policy.
- b) Comply with the SAQA *Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation on the NQF*, including not to apply unfair exclusionary practices in membership admission to the body or when recognising education and training providers.
- c) Initiate and participate in partnerships with education and training providers to promote CAT.

### 39. Responsibilities of workplaces:

- a) Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this policy.
- b) Proactively engage with education and training providers to contribute to the acceptance of new qualifications and a general awareness of the role and function of CAT.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the finalisation of this policy, private skills development providers that offer qualifications and part qualifications in the trade and occupational sector must be accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, but are not required to be registered (see the Joint Communiqué issued by the Department of Higher Education and Training, SAQA and the Quality Councils in August 2012). This interim registration measure will be reviewed.

- c) Actively promote the recognition of workplace experience and provide for CAT in collaboration with the Quality Councils.

#### **Transitional arrangements**

40. This policy comes into effect on the date of its publication in the Government Gazette.



**List of acronyms**

CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CHE	Council on Higher Education
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework
MerSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

**Members of the SAQA CAT Reference Group**

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