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## GOVERNMENT NOTICE

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**SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

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# Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework

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## Foreword

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act 67 of 2008) requires that the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) develops Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) after consultation with the three Quality Councils. This is the first time a National Policy on CAT has been developed in South Africa. The introduction of CAT has been given a high priority in South Africa as one of the tools that will positively contribute to the facilitation of lifelong learning.

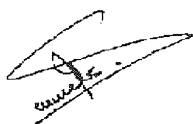
SAQA envisages that this Policy will have a positive impact on the education and training system as it puts in place nationally agreed principles which have the potential to ensure that opportunities for individuals to progress, from qualification to qualification in the NQF, are increased.

This CAT Policy draws on existing good practice, while also providing a strong impetus for change. It promotes articulation between qualifications within and across the three Sub-Frameworks of the NQF and has the potential to improve access to the world of work. As well as setting out the principles on which the CAT system is based, this Policy explains aspects of the operation of the system and sets out the specific roles of SAQA, the Quality Councils, education institutions, skills development providers, recognised professional bodies, and workplaces. The Policy recognises that the context across the three Sub-Frameworks of the NQF differs substantially and this fact was therefore carefully considered in the drafting process.

SAQA recognises the valuable contribution made by the CAT Reference Group (see the end of this Policy document for the list of members), as well as the organisations and individuals, both local and international, that commented on earlier drafts of this Policy.

SAQA looks forward to working with all NQF partners and stakeholders in implementing this Policy and further developing the CAT system in South Africa to the benefit of all lifelong learners and towards the implementation of an articulated, quality-assured National Qualifications Framework.

This Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework comes into effect on the date of its publication in the Government Gazette.



Joe Samuels  
Chief Executive Officer

## Glossary of terms

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

“Articulation” means facilitating the progress and mobility of learners within and across each of the three Sub-Frameworks and to the world of work, which is achieved by the intentional design of structure and content of qualifications.

“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. The matching of curricular properties should also be considered when comparability is determined.

“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.

“Credit accumulation” means the totalling of relevant 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 relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions.

“Credits” means the amount of learning contained in a qualification or part-qualification whereby one (1) credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.

“Curriculum” in the context of this Policy means the requirements for learner achievement of a qualification or part-qualification in terms of knowledge, skills, and where relevant, also work experience.

“Exclusionary practices” means systems and processes that are designed to limit fairly the opportunities of specific individuals or groupings of individuals to gain access to further learning or professional recognition when they do not meet legitimate criteria for admission or professional registration. Unfair exclusionary practices limit opportunities based on illegitimate criteria, such as race, gender and affordability and may be contested.

“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.

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

“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.

“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)” is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications.

“Notional hours of learning” comprises the total amount of time it would take an average learner to meet the outcomes defined in a learning experience and include, *inter alia*, face-to face contact time, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, time for completing assignments and research, and time spent in assessment processes.

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

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

“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 practise in an occupational field.

“Provider” means a body that offers any education programme or trade and occupational learning programme that leads to a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF.

“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 and/or with funding implications.

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

# Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework

## Preamble

1. This Policy 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 for 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 for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications, Part-qualifications and Professional Designations*.
3. The national RPL, CAT, and Assessment policies have been developed in an integrated manner to draw on a common conceptual basis and strengthen the interrelationships between Assessment, RPL and CAT:
  - a) Assessment refers to the process used to identify, gather and interpret information and evidence against the required competencies in a qualification, part-qualification, or professional designation in order to make a judgement about a learner's achievement. Assessment in respect of formal, informal and non-formal learning is transparent and includes CAT and RPL where feasible.
  - b) RPL refers to 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. RPL can be undertaken for the awarding of credits, or for access. Assessment is an integral feature of all forms of RPL, but does not exist in isolation from a range of other strategies that allow for different sources of knowledge and forms of learning to be compared and judged.
  - c) CAT refers to an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. Credits previously obtained may be recognised as meeting the requirements for a different qualification, and, subject to identified limits, the credits achieved towards one qualification may be recognised as meeting part of the requirements for another qualification. Decisions regarding the transfer of credit are made by the Quality Council(s) responsible for the qualifications in question, once the necessary evaluations have been completed.

4. 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.

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.

5. SAQA and the Quality Councils (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.

6. The Policy is located within the broader context of the government's Human Resource Development Strategy, the National Skills Development Strategy, and other national strategies.

7. The NQF in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of 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.

8. The NQF, as an integrated framework overseen by SAQA is made up of three co-ordinated Sub-Frameworks, each overseen by a QC:

- 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.



## Scope

9. This Policy applies to:

- a) SAQA, QCs, public and private education institutions and skills development providers, assessment bodies, recognised professional bodies, and workplaces.
- b) All qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF and offered in South Africa.

10. The specific context of each QC and its Sub-Framework must be considered in the interpretation of this Policy.

## Purpose

11. This Policy facilitates the development of credible, efficient and transparent processes both for the accumulation of credit within qualifications and for the transfer of credit between qualifications both within and between the Sub-Frameworks of the NQF.

12. This Policy provides for the development and implementation of CAT as an integral component of qualification design within the NQF and its Sub-Frameworks.

13. This Policy intends to benefit individuals seeking to progress between qualifications or part-qualifications on the NQF, and between these qualifications and the world of work.

14. The Policy brings arrangements for the accumulation of credit and arrangements for the transfer of credit into a single differentiated system. It has implications for a range of practices related to the completion of qualifications on the NQF and progression between qualifications in the NQF. The development of qualifications needs to provide for CAT. The Policy also has implications for admission committees in higher education, the allocation of credits through RPL, the use of advanced standing, and agreements on recognition of qualifications by recognised professional bodies.

## Principles for CAT

15. This Policy for CAT is based on the following principles which will guide the work of all organisations and institutions responsible for developing, quality assuring and/or offering qualifications in the NQF:

*a. Access for success*

Institutions and providers facilitate the bridging of theory and/or practice components that are identified as weaknesses during admission and/or RPL processes in order to promote CAT. Steps are taken to support individuals starting on courses in new sectors or more advanced courses by identifying gaps in knowledge and/or skills and making arrangements to supply these gaps through bridging courses or other supplementary work.

*b. Articulation by design*

Possibilities for articulation pathways, including within and between the Sub-Frameworks of the NQF and the world of work, are included in the design and purposes of new qualifications and part-qualifications in order to promote CAT.

*c. Comparison based on credible methods*

In promoting CAT, qualifications are 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. The comparison of qualifications takes into account the purpose of each qualification as well as the broader application of the qualifications within the context for which they were designed. The degree of similarity between qualifications ensures that students have the necessary knowledge and background to be successful in more advanced courses. The decisions of receiving departments or institutions on the transfer of credit may be appealed by providers or learners using processes agreed by the QCs.

*d. Supplementarity*

Where there are differences in prerequisites, the rigour of the curriculum, or the topics covered, the relevant authority may require the learner to do supplementary work before credits are awarded. This supplementary work is determined in a fair, consistent and transparent manner, using credible methods, and in consultation between the two institutions. The amount of credit awarded for transfer may be set by a pre-existing agreement, or may be decided by the authority responsible for the programme into which credit is being transferred. The amount of credits will vary according to the comparability of the outcomes gained to the outcomes required.

*e. Transparency*

Rules, regulations and any register of precedents which inform, influence or govern decisions taken in respect to CAT are valid, fair, reliable and transparent. They must be publicly available and drawn to the attention of intending students prior to enrolment. This should include clear information about fees for CAT where they are charged.

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

16. 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 at a specific level of the NQF as described in the level descriptors. One credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning.

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

18. 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 /or
- b. *Specific articulation* is based on formal and informal agreements within the education 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.
- c. Systemic and/or specific articulation may apply to qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations.

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

- a. In the case of systemic articulation:
  - (i) National - the recognition and accumulation of credits across all institutions within South Africa.
- b. In the case of specific articulation:
  - (i) Intra-institutional – the totalling of credits within a specific institution, or department within an institution;
  - (ii) Inter-institutional – the recognition and accumulation of credits between two or more institutions. In these instances, the purpose of the qualification, the associated learning outcomes, the nature of the curriculum, and the value of the credits are taken into account.

20. Credit transfer is the process whereby credits awarded in one learning programme can count towards:

- a) the same learning programme in another institution;
- b) another learning programme on the same or a different level of the NQF, the same or a different Sub-Framework of the NQF, a different department in the same institution, or in a different institution.

21. The NQF, through the level descriptors, provides a basis for credit matrices that can be developed by specific Sub-Frameworks or sectors as a means to further promote CAT.

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

22. The development and implementation 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, assessment bodies, recognised professional bodies and workplaces. Specific responsibilities of each contributor are outlined below.

23. Responsibilities of SAQA:

- a) Develop national policy for CAT, after consultation with the QCs.
- b) Develop national CAT guidelines for institutional practice, inter-institutional collaboration and cross-sector qualifications linkages, after consultation with the QCs and other stakeholders.
- c) Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this CAT Policy.
- d) Co-ordinate the Sub-Frameworks of the NQF, including the alignment of Sub-Framework policies on CAT, to enable articulation across the system.
- e) Support the development of collaborative partnerships across the Sub-Frameworks of the NQF to develop an enabling environment for CAT and the progression of lifelong learners in general.
- f) In collaboration with the QCs, establish and manage a monitoring and mediation process to advise and alert institutions regarding potential and actual transgressions relating to national SAQA and QC CAT policies. This process must take appeal mechanisms located at the level of the education and training provider, as well as those of the relevant QC, into account, and may involve publishing unfair or contested exclusionary practices relating to CAT.

- g) Support the Sub-Committee on RPL<sup>1</sup> to act as an advisory forum for SAQA and the QCs as part of the monitoring and mediation process outlined above, and to identify issues and good practice relating to articulation and CAT.
- h) Oversee research to improve CAT in collaboration with the QCs. 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.

#### 24. Responsibilities of the QCs:

- 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 of the NQF.
- c) 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.
- d) Formalise principles and conditions for CAT that guide and encourage the development of articulation agreements within their specific Sub-Frameworks.
- e) Undertake systematic work on the development of credit schemes within their specific Sub-Frameworks.
- f) Initiate and oversee projects within their specific Sub-Frameworks to strengthen the conceptual understanding of CAT, build capacity in the use of credit, and promote good practices.
- g) As and where applicable, develop linkages for articulation and progression to promote CAT within and across their Sub-Frameworks through facilitating and encouraging formal articulation agreements among institutions, co-ordinated quality assurance systems, bridging programmes and the formation of regional groupings of linked institutions as required.
- h) Promote the collaborative development of curriculum and qualification pathways between different types of provisioning to promote and enable successful CAT.
- i) Provide a mechanism in QC policy to deal with unfair CAT practices.
- j) Collaborate in the national monitoring and mediation processes to advise and alert institutions within their Sub-Frameworks regarding potential and actual transgressions, relating to national SAQA and QC CAT policies.
- k) Actively promote the recognition of workplace-based learning for CAT in collaboration with workplaces.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Sub-Committee on RPL* refers to a committee proposed in the *National Policy for the Implementation of RPL* (SAQA, 2013, clause 49d) that will report to the CEO Committee comprising the CEOs of SAQA and the Quality Councils, as well as members of the Interdepartmental NQF Steering Committee. The Sub-Committee on RPL could consist of representatives from the Department of Higher Education and Training, SAQA, the Quality Councils, the National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB), the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), RPL practitioners and researchers, public and private providers, professional bodies, and organised labour and other stakeholders.

25. Responsibilities of education institutions, skills development providers and assessment bodies as applicable:

- a) Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this Policy.
- b) Develop and implement an institutional policy on CAT in accordance with the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this Policy to ensure equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities.
- c) Demonstrate through regular internal and external quality reviews, including those done by the QCs, that their policies and practices for CAT support the principles as listed in this Policy.
- d) Seek accreditation by the relevant QC(s) where applicable<sup>2</sup>.
- e) 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>3</sup>
- f) Provide career advice services on career pathways and articulation routes.
- g) Put in place appropriate appeal mechanisms.
- h) Avoid unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT.
- i) In the case of higher education providers, the residency clause must be consistently applied to expedite learner mobility and not to limit CAT.
- j) Collaborate to offer diverse and mutually recognised qualifications, through formal articulation agreements and in regional consortia where relevant.
- k) Set fair and transparent admission criteria that are consistent with national policy.
- l) Address the bridging of theory and/or practice components that are identified as weaknesses during admission processes, including through RPL.
- m) Undertake collaborative approaches to curriculum development across different institutional types to advance CAT, including alignment of curricula in common fields, taking into account their purpose and the types of knowledge and competencies.
- n) Initiate and participate in partnerships with other education and training providers to implement and promote CAT.

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<sup>2</sup> Provincial departments of education that reside with the Department of Basic Education are deemed to be accredited as providers.

<sup>3</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.

- o) Develop and maintain information management systems that are compatible with the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) and other relevant government information management systems, and submit the relevant data to SAQA using effective existing systems.
- p) Participate in - and adhere to - the findings of the national adjudication process set up by SAQA and the Quality Councils to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT.
- q) Through representative organisations, participate in and contribute to the sub-committee on RPL.

26. 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 and workplaces to recognise and promote CAT.
- d) Provide career advice services on career pathways and articulation routes.
- e) Participate in and adhere to the findings of the national adjudication process set up by SAQA and the QCs to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT.
- f) Through representative organisations, participate in and contribute to the work of the Sub-Committee on RPL.

**Effective Implementation Date**

27. 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
QC	Quality Council
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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Jay Moodley	Mining Qualifications Authority
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