

## 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), 2017/18

I, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, hereby publish the *Guidelines on Strategy and Priorities for the National Qualifications Framework, 2017/18* 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 for the coming period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018.



Dr BE Nzimande, MP  
Minister of Higher Education and Training

Date:

04/04/2017

## MINISTERIAL GUIDELINES ON STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES FOR THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) 2017/2018

### This Document

1. This document sets out the 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 from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. It updates, builds on and augments the *Guidelines* of 2015/16 which covered the period to 31 March 2017. New *Guidelines* were not published for the period 2016/17, to give the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Quality Council for Higher Education and Training (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi) a longer timeframe to address issues which require further development and implementation from earlier *Guidelines*.
2. The NQF Act assigns executive responsibility for the entire NQF to the Minister of Higher Education and Training. These 2017/18 *Guidelines* have been developed after a consultative process, with the Inter-departmental NQF Steering Committee, internal Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) branches and with SAQA and the Quality Councils (QCs).
3. These 2017/18 *Guidelines* give direction to the work of SAQA and the three QCs and set realistic timeframes for implementation which take into account Ministerial and departmental processes.
4. The Post-school Education and Training (PSET) Plan, which is derived from the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training will in all likelihood give more direction or substance to parts of these 2017/18 *Guidelines*. SAQA and the QCs will then be required to be guided by the emerging proposals from the PSET Plan. The proposals for SAQA and the QCs which emerge from the Plan, will be published as an addition to these 2017/18 *Guidelines*.

### Strategic Considerations

5. Previous *Guideline* documents outlined the strategic importance for our society and economy of a well-functioning education and training system. The 2014/15 and 2015/16 *Guidelines*

drew attention to the serious imbalances, inequalities and shortages that persist in provision of education and training at all levels and across all sectors.

6. The National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it Work (November 2011)(NDP) and the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (*White Paper*) make bold proposals for better planning, targeted provision and improved support services over the period to 2030 in order to eliminate progressively the worst deficits in provision.
7. South Africans of all ages and races deserve improved, inclusive, transformed, and articulated teaching, learning and assessment opportunities. An enabling environment must be created to provide opportunities for access, mobility, progression in the delivery of quality education and training, and to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
8. The government is committed to expanding provision but expansion alone will not overcome the current challenges facing the post-school system. A well-functioning system achieves its outcomes only if its components inter-connect, and inter-relate efficiently, working together for a common purpose.
9. The creation in 2009 of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) “signalled a renewed determination by the government to eliminate the institutionalised obstacles to access and progress in our learning system” (*Guidelines*, 2012, p. 5).
10. The *White Paper* has “set out a vision of a transformed post-school system which is an integral part of the government’s policies to develop our country and improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people. Central to these policies is the determination to bring about social justice, to overcome the legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, and to overcome inequity and injustice whatever its origins” (*White Paper*, p. 75).
11. The place of the NQF in the wider education and training system is clearly spelt out in the *White Paper*: “The NQF Act provides the overarching context in which all regulation takes place. The NQF provides the context for provision, assessment, certification and quality

assurance. The National Qualifications Framework overarches the whole education and training system in South Africa" (*White Paper*, p. 69).

12. Social, economic, and community development and growth have to be yardsticks against which the policies and activities of each of our policies and interventions need to be measured. "Qualifications and part-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" (*Guidelines* 2012, p. 5).
13. SAQA is recognised in the *White Paper* as "the body with overall responsibility for the implementation of the NQF" (*White Paper*, p. 69), and the three QCs are identified as "the primary bodies with a direct role in governing quality assurance and certification" (*White Paper*, p 71). The *White Paper* (p. 71) provides for "the current structures and remits" of SAQA and the QCs to remain, as "the overwhelming response to the Green Paper (2012) from stakeholders has been that the solution to current problems should not be another restructuring. The general consensus is that restructuring would cause further confusion and disruption, and may not achieve the desired improvements". This part of the vision enunciated in the *White Paper* will remain valid whatever the further developments of the NQF might take in the future.

### Priorities for the period to March 2018

14. 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.
15. The priorities for SAQA and the QCs in this period are informed by the outstanding implementation work required to be completed from previous *Guideline* documents, the *NQF Implementation Framework 2011 to 2015*, the *NQF Implementation Framework 2015 to 2020*, and the *White Paper*. These documents identify critical areas which require the focused agency and effort by SAQA and the QCs for the period until March 2018.

16. These priorities can be amended once the Post-school Education and Training Plan is published and specific proposals are made for implementation by SAQA and the QCs.
17. Good progress has been made in addressing priorities listed in 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*.

### ***Transformation***

18. The NQF has a transformation agenda built into the objectives of the NQF. It is clear that work still needs to be done in the further development and implementation of the NQF, to realise the full transformation impact. One of the areas which can lead to improved transformation impact is the articulation mechanism. SAQA and the QCs are requested to re-look the current criteria for the development of new qualifications and part-qualifications, to ensure that there is credible and authentic integration of the three sub-frameworks and that qualifications and part-qualifications registered on the NQF have clear articulation routes described in the qualification standards and statements.
19. SAQA, after consultation with Umalusi, the CHE and the QCTO is requested to advise the Minister by the end of March 2018 about amended registration criteria for qualifications and part-qualifications, which may support the wider transformation agenda intended in the NQF Act.

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

20. The NQF Act (s. 11) requires SAQA to “co-ordinate the sub-frameworks” and this responsibility is echoed in the *NQF Implementation Framework 2016 to 2020*. Co-ordination is a means to achieve simplicity, coherence and articulation in an integrated and transparent framework. SAQA has to ensure ongoing co-ordination of the sub-frameworks to address challenges associated with articulation, credit accumulation and transfer, and RPL.
21. The 2011/12 *Guidelines* (para. 17) charged the QCs to advise on:
  - a. The essential character of each sub-framework;
  - b. The demarcation between each sub-framework; and
  - c. The basis on which sub-frameworks articulate with one another.

22. The 2012/13 *Guidelines* stated that the learning, occupational and career path objectives of the NQF Act (sections 5 and 7) can be served only by an appropriately articulated qualifications framework.
23. For the purposes of the 2017/18 *Guideline*, the QCTO is requested to work with SAQA to better describe the essential character of the Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF), and all the QCs are requested to work with SAQA to describe how the respective qualifications and part qualifications may or may not articulate within and between the other sub-frameworks of the NQF.
24. The White Paper states that “the Quality Councils may have an extended remit in the sense that they can quality assure qualifications on NQF levels from which they were previously restricted” (WP: p. 71). In the light of this, each of the QCs, in consultation with SAQA, must provide proposals on the demarcation and/or extended remit of their respective sub-frameworks.
25. The QCs and SAQA must provide a consolidated report to the Minister about how they have implemented the Articulation and the RPL Coordination Policies. Issues of implementation of articulation within and between sub-frameworks must be included in the report. The report must be submitted to the Minister by 31 March 2018.

***Workplace-based Learning/Work Integrated Learning and Modes of teaching and learning***

26. SAQA, in consultation with the QCs, must advise the Minister whether the SAQA “*Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the NQF*” should be amended to accommodate new foci on modes of teaching and learning and workplace-based learning requirements.
27. In addition, particular consideration will need to be given to the inclusion of simulation and/or simulated workplace-based learning where actual placement in workplaces is limited. Alternate environments such as a simulated workplace environments may need to be provided to facilitate the completion of a qualification and part-qualification which comprise a WBL component.

28. Consideration must also be given to modes of teaching and learning such as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and Open Learning, and how these are recognised for articulation, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit accumulation and credit transfer (CAT) purposes.
29. Therefore, SAQA and the QCs must work collaboratively to advise the Minister by 31 March 2018 about the extent to which qualification design should include consideration of different modes of teaching and learning as additional registration criteria, and the how such modes of teaching, learning and assessment could impact on articulation, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and recognition of prior learning (RPL).

### ***Implementation of the WP PSET***

30. The *White Paper* was published in 2013, and was highlighted as a focus area in the 2015/16 *Guideline* document. SAQA and the Quality Councils were requested to consider the issues which impact the NQF and to provide the Minister with a report on progress in implementing the policy directives of the *White Paper*. SAQA provided the consolidated report which outlined the work that has been done thus far, by SAQA and the QCs.
31. Whilst SAQA and QCs have achieved a strong policy framework, implementation is now a key focus of work especially in areas such as the simplification of the NQF, further developing and supporting an integrated and articulated post-school education and training system.
32. System-wide implementation of articulation and RPL remain key priorities in the period covered by these 2017/18 *Guidelines*. The Minister's policy on RPL Coordination and the policy on Articulation provide overarching strategic guidance to SAQA, the QCs and the other key stakeholders to guide implementation. SAQA's policies have been developed and published. In consultation with the DHET and with SAQA, the QCs must complete their policy development processes and publish their articulation and RPL policies, where this activity has not yet been completed. These operational policies must be published by 31 March 2018.

### ***Addressing discriminatory practices***

33. The DHET has identified that there are clear discriminatory practices against, *inter alia*, artisans who entered their trade tests via a RPL route; discrimination by some professional bodies against graduates with the National N Diploma; and other exclusionary practices carried out in the daily application of consideration of promotion opportunities for employees, employment opportunities for work-seekers and access to study further for

people who want to access further learning via a RPL route. These are serious issues which undermine the credibility of the NQF, its objectives and the implementation of the NQF apparatus such as articulation, CAT and RPL.

34. SAQA and the QCs must work with institutions and professional bodies to address discriminatory practices. It is important to communicate and advocate the need to improve articulation possibilities, RPL opportunities and recognition of parity of esteem of qualifications registered at the same level on the NQF, irrespective of whether the qualification purpose is academic or vocational or occupational.

#### ***Quality Assurance, and certification***

35. Cognizance is taken of the fact that each of the QCs deals differently with issues related to broader quality assurance and certification issues. The QCs must ensure that all backlogs in quality assurance processes, such as accreditation of providers, external moderation and verification and certification of learners is dealt with by 31 December 2017. SAQA after consultation with the QCs must provide the Minister with two semester reports which inform the Minister about the progress being made in each of the named areas.

#### ***Digitization and Verification***

36. SAQA has been tasked to digitize learner records. Collaborative partnerships between SAQA and other role-players are in place to ensure that records of artisans and educators are digitized. SAQA must continue with this important work, and provide the Minister with an update in the form of a report about the Digitization project by 31 March 2018. The QCs must cooperate with SAQA to ensure learner records are digitized.
37. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) published a Directive on 1 October 2015, regarding the verification of qualifications for Public Servants. The Minister of Higher Education and Training has Cabinet approval to consult with Ministers to address issues of misrepresentation of qualifications across the three spheres of Government. SAQA is directed in the DPSA directive to be the verification organization. The QCs also conduct verifications of qualifications within their respective sub-frameworks. They must provide the information to SAQA to record on the verification database, and provide SAQA with the information where misrepresentation of qualifications occurs. SAQA is requested to continue to provide the Minister with updates and reports every two months, on all cases of misrepresentation of qualifications.

## Conclusion

35. The NQF remains a key mechanism in the range of education and training policies and strategies to ensure that the South African Constitutional requirements are met, and that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are realized. SAQA and the QCs have worked hard to ensure a respected place in global discourses about qualifications frameworks, NQFs, and harmonization processes. These 2017/18 *Guidelines* are directives to SAQA and the QCs for the 2017/18 financial year to further develop and implement the South African NQF, and to ensure that the NQF objectives are met and implemented across the education and training spectrum.