

**Article category: Human Resources**

## **Getting to Grips with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)**

*By Terry Deacon*

*Did you know that South Africa has yet another "official language"? It's called SAQ-ish and to a greater or lesser extent we will all have to understand this new language.*

Since the start of outcomes-based education and training in terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a whole new vocabulary, abbreviations and acronyms have been defined by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The name "SAQ-ish" has been coined for this new "language". It's great for impressing people at cocktail parties – just drop the phrases *critical cross-field education and training outcomes* or *integrative formative and summative assessment methods* and your level of respect should rise considerably.

What is the NQF, how did it all start and what progress has been made? I, who am a member of the Project Management Standards Generating Body (PMSGGB), have taken a look at this massive programme which aims to transform education and training in South Africa.

### **History in the making**

The NQF traces its origins back to the labour movement of the early 1970s, when black trade unions' demands for better wages were repeatedly rejected by employers on the grounds that workers were unskilled and therefore their demands were unjustified. This led to black workers seeing training as a means of achieving their demands for better wages. There was a need not only for basic education, without which workers would not be able to access the education and training system, but also for portability and national recognition of training so that workers would not be at the mercy of a single employer.

The mid-1970s witnessed a demand for change in education, spearheaded by the non-governmental education sector. Protest was epitomised in the Soweto student uprising of 1976. By the 1980s, the entire education system had been discredited and rejected. After an extended conflictual relationship, the Department of Manpower and the trade union federations convened in 1992 in an attempt to resolve the

problem. The Department of Education simultaneously initiated its own process of policy discussion, which culminated in the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS). The ERS advocated three streams – academic, vocational, and vocationally oriented. The education employer sector participated in the process, advocating a seamless framework similar to that adopted by Scotland and New Zealand. An Inter-ministerial Working Group was established to draft the NQF Bill, which was passed into law as the South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995) in October 1995.

Creating the NQF is a classic vision to reality project – in fact, it's a massive programme comprising a portfolio of projects in which virtually every South African is a real stakeholder. One of the higher profile projects of the NQF programme is the Curriculum 2005 endeavour. All schoolchildren and their parents were to be involved through this outcomes-based approach to school education. However on 31 May 2000 the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, announced that Curriculum 2005 was to be replaced by Curriculum 21, the main reason being that the capacity of teachers was inadequate to implement the complex system.

Most businesses are already contributing 0,5% of their wages and salaries bill to the skills development funds. Next year in April, the contribution will be raised to 1,0%, and it is rumoured that by 2003 we may be paying up to 4,0%! Providers of higher education such as Universities, Technikons, and private providers of education and training are scrambling to become accredited with SAQA, so that learners (that's the new generic name for pupils, students, delegates, candidates, etc.) can claim back a portion (about 60 %) of the cost of their training.

In the NQF, all learning is organised into twelve fields. SAQA has established twelve NSBs, one for each organising field, namely:

- NSB 01: Agriculture and Nature Conservation
- NSB 02: Culture and Arts
- NSB 03: Business, Commerce and Management Studies
- NSB 04: Communication Studies and Language
- NSB 05: Education, Training and Development
- NSB 06: Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
- NSB 07: Human and Social Studies
- NSB 08: Law, Military Science and Security
- NSB 09: Health Science and Social Services
- NSB 10: Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences

NSB 11: Services

NSB 12: Physical Planning and Construction

Each NSB is divided into sub-fields for which a Standards Generating Body is established to generate unit standards and qualifications. It is envisaged that over 300 such SGBs will be created over the next few years.

### **SAQA takes the lead**

SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) is heading up the NQF programme with 70 full-time staff from its headquarters in Pretoria. They are assisted by up to 10 outsourced consultants. SAQA has two 'arms' i.e. standards setting and quality assurance. The sub-structures in the standards setting arm are the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), while the sub-structures in the quality assurance arm are the Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). SAQA fall under the Department of Education, while the ETQAs fall under the Department of Labour.

*ProjectPro* asked SAQA, the *de facto* NQF programme manager, for details on how they are planning, implementing and controlling, this complex endeavour which makes the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) look tame by comparison. SAQA's mission is "To ensure the development and implementation of a National Qualifications Framework which contributes to the full development of each learner and to the social and economic development of the nation at large." Sounds easy when put into one sentence.

Michael Cosser, SAQA Deputy Director, Framework Development, explained how the management structure of SAQA worked. At top management level there is an NQF Board of about 30 persons that meet every two months to make policy decisions. The SAQA management team is headed up by Samuel Isaacs, Executive Officer (EO), and with directors the directorates of Standards Setting, Quality Assurance and Information Management they hold operational meetings every morning, and strategic meetings every two weeks. There is a Strategic Support Unit, which provides a communication and advisory function to the EO.

EU funding requires the use of logical frameworks or logframes for short, which is a kind of project management approach setting out the organisation's deliverables with timelines for each of the activities and tasks to achieve the deliverable. Each of the 12 NSBs has a SAQA co-

ordinator assigned to it, who jointly project manages the activities with the NSB's link person or focus group leader.

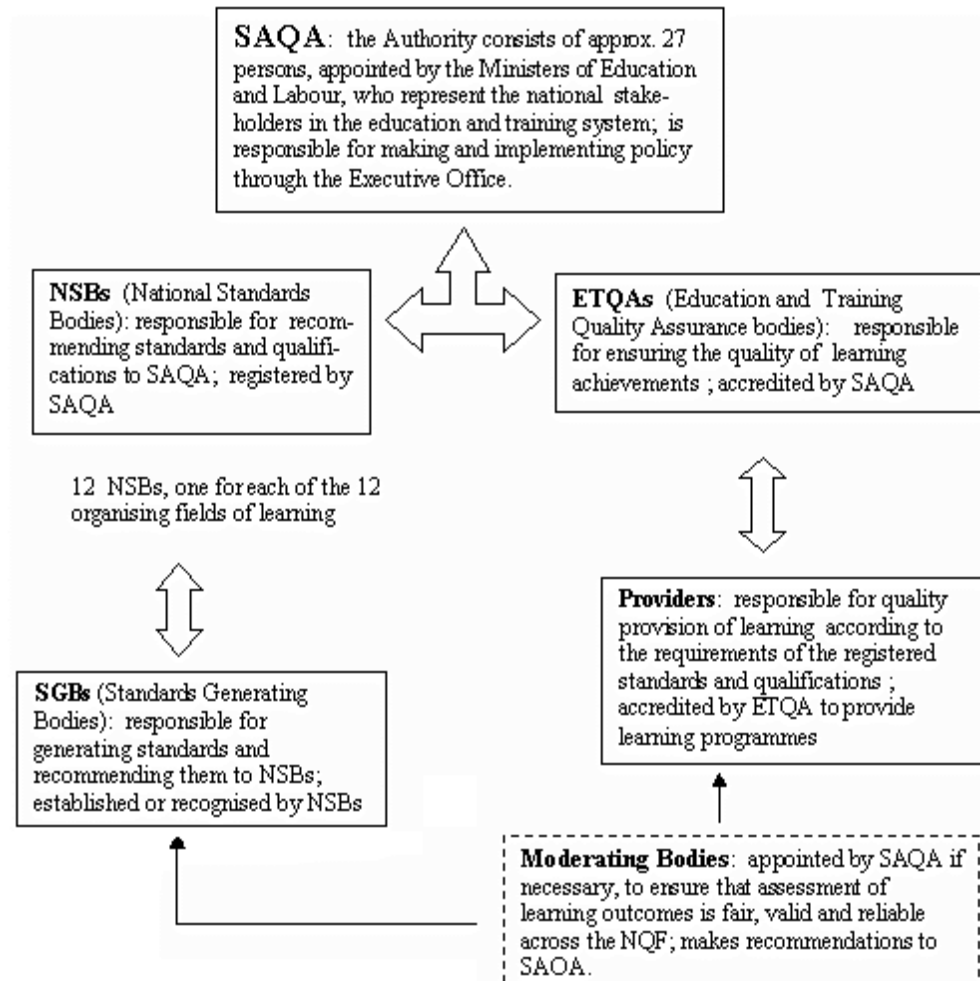
One of the important functions of the SAQA co-ordinator should be to integrate the activities of the various SGBs. For instance, the Project Management SGB is a cross-field endeavour in that, many of the other 12 NQF fields will overlap with and be interested in incorporating project management unit standards into their qualifications. For instance, there is a project management component in the construction and information technology fields. Recently a Higher Education and Training (HET) SGB was formed and there are concerns that this could lead to clashes of interest with the PMSGb. It should not be left to the unpaid volunteers working on the SGBs to carry out the integration management on their own. The SAQA co-ordinator should take the lead on matters of inter-NSB and SGB integration to identify overlaps and avoid duplication, timeously.

### **Activity is reaching a fever pitch**

The first half of 2000 has seen feverish activity. Higher Education and Training organisations had to provisionally become accredited with SAQA. All businesses had to register with the SA Revenue Services to pay their Skills Development Levies from April and they are now busy developing workplace skill plans so that they may claim some of their approved training costs back.

Where do we stand today? Michael Cosser, commenting on progress to date, says, "We believe that we have made significant progress in implementing the NQF. We presently have 40 registered SGBs, with another 26 in the public comment phase. We estimate that by 2002 there should be a total of 350 SGBs, based on the number of sub-fields and focus groups."

The NSB03 for Business, Commerce and Management Studies held a plenary session at the University of Pretoria on 9 May 2000. On the agenda was feedback from their 13 SGBs on their experiences and progress. Richard Plant of the Financial Services SGB reported that they could draw on over 350 units standards that had been drawn up before their SGB was formed. Terry Meyer and Mike Watkins of NSB03, and Joe Samuels of SAQA also gave presentations. Lieneke Thyssen of SAQA was also on hand to answer the many questions of the delegates.



**Fig. 1: ETQAs and SETAs**

The two sub-structures in the SAQA standards setting arm are the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and the Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), while the sub-structures in the quality assurance arm are the Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). SAQA report to the Department of Education.

The structures and processes associated with the NQF form a total quality system with built-in feedback mechanisms to ensure ongoing improvements to the system. Any good quality management system requires that a third party be responsible for monitoring and auditing to ensure that standards and qualifications are being satisfactorily achieved.

This is the role of (here's some more SAQ-ish for you) the Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) bodies, which are presently being rapidly, formed. They will also be responsible for accrediting the providers of training courses, as well as managing the funds generated by the skill development levies and paying back the rebates. There are presently 25 SETAs that fall under the National Skills Authority (NSA) and although they report to the Department of Labour, they still need to be accredited by SAQA.

What's the difference between an ETQA and a SETA? Various models have been developed for establishing ETQAs in three distinct sectors: Education and Training Sub-system, Social, and Economic (see fig. 1).

The Education and Training Sub-system Sector has one ETQA for each of the three bands of the NQF, namely:

- General Education and Training (level 1) and possibly a separate ETQA for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)
- Further Education and Training (level 2 to 4)
- Higher Education and Training (level 5 to 8).

(See fig. 2)

The Economic Sector model has various ETQAs which will cover all levels, but for different professional and learning pathways. The Skills Development Act has established SETAs that will function as ETQAs for 25 specific economic sectors. Each SETA is subdivided into a number of Chambers representing specific interests within the sector. For instance the Services SETA (SETA number 23) is presently sub-divided into nine Chambers for project management, general business, marketing, etc. There are also SETAs for sectors such as Banking, Insurance, Construction, etc. SETAs are one of two kinds of Economic Sector bodies that may apply for accreditation. Once registered with the Department of Labour, SETAs will assist with the transformation of the Industry Training Boards. The other type of Economic Sector bodies which may apply for accreditation are professional bodies (statutory or voluntary) are, e.g. Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

The Social Sector model is similar to the Economic Sector and includes, for example, the Electoral Development ETQA.

## **Project Management Standards**

The Project Management Standards Generating Body (PMSGB) had its genesis in October 1998 when a group of key stakeholders met in the offices of Eskom, Megawatt Park, Sandton, to discuss a strategy to establish a PMSGB steering committee concerning the NQF. The Cost Engineering Association of Southern Africa, which is primarily concerned with the project controls aspect of project management, joined the steering committee early in 2000. The SGB was formally Gazetted in March 2000 comprising 25 members (see *ProjectPro* March 2000, page 30).

The PMSGB falls under the NSB 03: Business, Commerce and Management Studies.

The PMSGB aims to write unit standards for qualifications from NQF level 4 to 7 which covers the 10 domains of Project Management Framework, Project Integration Management, Project Scope Management, Project Time Management, Project Financial Management, Project Risk Management, Project Communication Management, Project Human Resource Management, Project Procurement Management, Project Quality Management. The unit standards will in the short to medium term address the following NQF levels:

- Certificate in Project Management, (NQF level 4)
- Certificate and Diploma in Project Management (NQF level 5)
- Higher Diploma and Bachelors Degree in Project Management (NQF level 6)
- Masters Degree in Project Management (NQF level 7)

### **Unit Standards writing can be tricky**

All over South Africa groups called Standards Generating Bodies are springing up. One of their primary objectives is to write Unit Standards for a particular sub-field.

Unit Standards are the basic building blocks of the NQF and are defined as “registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria together with administrative and other information as specified in the NQF regulations.”

Various unit standards can be strung together with SAQA approval to form a qualification. Each unit standard is worth a number of credits, one credit being equal to 10 notional hours of work. The key elements of a unit standard are shown in fig 3.

### **Fig 3: Key Elements of a Unit Standard**

- Unit Standard Title
- Purpose
- Specific Outcomes
- Assessment Criteria
- Range Statements
- Critical Outcomes

The PMSGB had its first stab at writing unit standards at a workshop held in Sandton, Gauteng on 13 May 2000. The facilitator, Lisa Strong, was pleased to note the enthusiasm of the 22 attendees, but advised that smaller groups comprising about five people each would be more productive. She was right! The large group tended to disintegrate into simultaneous sessions, with Lisa having to bring them back to order on numerous occasions. There was also a tendency to argue too much about the precise terminology to be used.

However, to the credit of all present, especially Lisa's friendly but firm facilitation, a rough draft unit standard for defining project scope was produced. The group formed sub-groups on a follow-up workshop held on 3 June to tackle the other nine PM domains and define draft unit standards with their specific outcomes.

### **International compatibility**

SAQA have stated that the South African standards should be compatible with international standards, but unfortunately, various countries use different terminology. It's a pity that the global education and training community, ironically, couldn't even agree on standard terminology for a Unit Standard.

However, perhaps a bigger problem is the incompatibility of levels of Unit Standards. Let us take the United Kingdom (UK) and Australian levels for project management as an example.

Level 4 in UK National Vocational Qualifications is aimed at those who take responsibility for managing projects at the *operational* level, and level 5 at the *strategic* level. The Australian National Competency Standards for Project Management have defined level 4 as *applying skills*, level 5 as *guiding the application*, and level 6 as *managing* the PM process. Comparing the *level descriptors* (more SAQ-ish for you)



we can infer that levels 4 and 5 of the UK NVQ corresponds with the Australian levels 5 and 6 respectively.

### **Funding is scarce**

Before the Skills Development Levies started flowing in from April 2000, SAQA warned the SGBs that funding of their operations would be extremely limited. Bearing this in mind, SGBs formed funding workgroups, but times are hard (no matter what the economists say about our fundamentals) and cash donations have been few and far between, particularly for the PMSGGB. However, the Project Management Institute SA and the Association of Project Management gave the process a welcome injection of finances to kick-start the process. The companies of the PMSGGB members have also come to the party with generous contributions of man-hours, resources and some funds. If your company would like to make a contribution, please fill in the coupon included in this article and fax it back to us. For more details of the PMSGGB, visit their website at: [www.pmsggb.org.za](http://www.pmsggb.org.za) or email Mr Archie Mayer at: [pmsggb@global.co.za](mailto:pmsggb@global.co.za).

However, with the ETQAs being formed and funds flowing in from the skills development levies, the situation should improve. For instance, the Services SETA presently has budgeted R400 000 to be available to the PM Chamber. Not much, but it's a start.

At a higher level international funding has been forthcoming from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Primary Education Bilateral Grant Agreement with our government. SAQA also receives over R88-million in funding from European Union (EU), and held a project launch in May 2000 in Alexandra, Johannesburg, to formally acknowledge the contribution of the EU to its activities. Danida (Danish funders) are aiding seven SGBs in the Education, Training and Development fields, while CIDA (Canada) are funding the Information Management projects.

### **Quantity Surveying SGB**

NSB 12 for Physical Planning and Construction has recently received an application to recognise and register a Quantity Surveying SGB.

The proposed brief of the SGB is as follows:

1. Develop learning pathways for potential qualifications and unit standards in the sub-field Physical Planning, Design and Management from NQF level 4 through to level 8.

- Generate, either independently or in collaboration with relevant SGBs in the fields of Physical Planning and Construction; Business, Commerce & Management Studies; and Physical, Mathematical, Computer & Life Sciences, the following qualifications and standards in the sub-field, in accordance with SAQA requirements, at NQF levels 4 to 8.
  - Certificates and Diplomas in Assessment of Professional Competence, Continuing Professional Development, Quantity Surveying, Construction Management, Construction Project Management, Building Quantity Surveying and Construction Science, Building Quantity Surveying levels 4 to 5.
1. Further Diplomas and Degrees in Construction Management, (QS) Financial Management and Business Management, (QS) Computer Science, (QS) Construction Management, Quantity Surveying, Construction Studies, Property Studies, Construction Project Management, Housing Development and Management at levels 6 to 8.
  2. Research and assess professional competence and continuing professional development leading to renewal of professional qualifications within the Built Environment.
  3. Recommend the qualifications and standards generated under 2, above, to the NSB.
  4. Recommend criteria for the registration of assessors and moderators or moderating bodies.

#### **PROPOSED COMPOSITION OF THE QUANTITY SURVEYING SGB**

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Work Place</b>	<b>Nominating Body</b>	<b>Experience/Qualifications</b>
Butt PE	South African Institute of Building	The South African Institute of Building	MSc (Building Management)
Eichbaum MGC	Fraser Alexander Construction	Association of South African Quantity Surveyors	National Diploma In Surveying
Harmse E	Western Province Technical College	Western Province Technical College	National Technical Diploma
Hoyana TW	Letchmia Daya Hoyana Construction	Association of South African	B.Sc. (Quantity Surveying)

	Cost Consultants	Quantity Surveyors	
Israelite C	SIP	Association of South African Quantity Surveyors	B.Sc. Building
Jeptha S A	INFRACOM	INFRACOM	Doctor of Education
Kgobokoe K	Department of Welfare	Department of Welfare	M.Ed (Counselling)
Louw A	South African Institute of Architects	South African Institute of Architects	B.A. Architecture
Michell KA	University of Cape Town	Association of South African Quantity Surveyors	Master of Philosophy
Mocheko MF	Department of Correctional Services	Department of Correctional Services	BCompt
Pretorius FJ	Department of Public Works	Department of Public Works	B.Sc. Quantity Surveying
Ramsay DN	Committee of Technikon Principals	Committee of Technikon Principals	B.Sc. (Quantity Surveying)
Senekal R	Architecture and Surveying Institute	Architecture and Surveying Institute	National Higher Diploma in Building Surveying
Sihlongonyane MF	South African Council for Town and Regional Planners	South African Council for Town and Regional Planners	M.Sc. Development Planning

### **An education and training transformation**

The National Qualifications Framework is pivotal to the deep transformation of South African education and training systems. It will ensure that as a nation we are able to meet our national developmental priorities, redress the imbalances of the past, open up opportunities and finally achieve much needed equity in education and training.

With this as our vision, we will bring everybody on board in building a great nation, thereby growing our economy into a prosperous one and developing South Africans into life-long learners in a quality system.

**Informative Websites**

[www.saqa.co.za](http://www.saqa.co.za)

**South African Qualifications Authority**

[www.pmsgb.org.za](http://www.pmsgb.org.za)

**Project Management Standards Generating Body**

[www.projectpro.co.za](http://www.projectpro.co.za)

***ProjectPro* Magazine and Outcomes-based Training**

[www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)

**New Zealand Qualification Authority**

[www.hmiso.gov.uk](http://www.hmiso.gov.uk)

**Education in Scotland**

**Fig 2 National Qualifications Framework**

NQF Level	Band	Qualification Type
8 7 6 5	Higher Education and Training (HET)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-doctoral research degrees</li> <li>• Doctorates</li> <li>• Masters degrees</li> <li>• Professional Qualifications</li> <li>• Honours degrees</li> <li>• National first degrees</li> <li>• Higher diplomas</li> <li>• National diplomas</li> <li>• National certificates</li> </ul>
<b>Further Education and Training (FET) Certificate</b>		
4 3 2	Further Education and Training	Grade 12 Grade 11 Grade 10 National certificates
<b>General Education and Training (GET) Certificate</b>		
1	General Education and Training	Grade 9   ABET Level 4 National certificates

