

# The inclusion of professional qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework: implications for work-integrated learning<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is an integrated framework. All levels (from basic to higher education), sectors (such as schooling, both public and private) and types of qualifications (such as academic, vocational and professional) are integrated into a single national system. This strong integrative approach was initially proposed to replace the fragmented system with a coherent structure that would bridge divisions between sectors of learning, most notably the entrenched differences in parity of esteem between general education and vocational education and training. Despite these noble intentions, the extremely unified *Scope* of the South African NQF has remained a major point of contention. One example of the problems faced as a result of the unified *Scope* of the NQF has been the classification of qualifications into 23 different types or categories - one such type being 'professional qualifications'. In 2006, faced with increasing pressure from professional bodies to review the status of these professional qualifications, SAQA initiated research to investigate the 426 qualifications currently categorised as 'professional' on the NQF (SAQA, 2006). As part of the research project the researcher was required to make a recommendation on the inclusion or exclusion of these 426 qualifications on the NQF. In this paper I briefly present the findings of the empirical research on the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF and then ask what the implications of the research recommendations are for work-integrated learning in South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was conceptualised over a period of more than 14 years, starting in the early 1980s. The Old Commonwealth, most notably Australia and England, as well as other dominant discourses of the day, particularly Freirean thinking on oppression and liberation, significantly influenced thinking in South Africa. Evidence of these influences include the virtually unquestioned acceptance of outcomes-based education and training (OBET), lifelong learning and even the commodification of education.

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** Not sure of what this contention of the charge of commodification is based – needs some sort of justification

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<sup>1</sup> Paper to be presented at the SASCE International Conference, 17 to 20 April 2006, Riviera International Hotel, Vereeniging, South Africa. Please note that this is a work in progress that will be more fully developed in the months to follow. The views expressed in this paper are my own and do not necessarily reflect SAQA policy.

The NQF was formally established in 1995 with the promulgation of the SAQA Act (SA, 1995). The objectives of the NQF were clearly stipulated in the Act, namely to:

1. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
2. facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

In March 1997 the SAQA Executive Officer assumed duties and the implementation of the NQF started in earnest. After only five years, in 2002, a Ministerial Study Team was appointed to “recommend ways in which the implementation of the South African NQF...could be streamlined and accelerated” (DoE and DoL, 2002:i). The appointment of the Study Team set in motion an extended review process of the NQF that has been characterised by internecine power struggles and contestations (see Keevy, 2005) – a review process that until the present day remains to be concluded.

At present there are more than 30 national qualifications frameworks implemented, or being implemented, across the world. More recently this has included three regional qualifications frameworks, one in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), one in the European Union and another in the Caribbean (Tuck *et al*, 2006). Although these developments have much in common with the South African NQF, there are also significant differences, particularly in the extent to which the frameworks include different types of qualifications, sectors and epistemologies.

The terminology that is used to describe the extent to which such differences are included on NQFs vary greatly and has, more often than not, created considerable misunderstandings. It is therefore necessary for me, at the outset of this paper, to clearly (that is as clearly possible, as my own thinking develops during the drafting of this paper) articulate how I interpret the terms. I base these interpretations on work by Raffe (2005), Granville (2003 and 2004) and Young (2005). I also find some support from the work of Tuck, Hart and Keevy (2004) that was subsequently refined by Keevy (2005) - this work has led to the development of an NQF typology that, as noted by SAQA (2005), has proved to be a “a conceptual tool that may shed some light on the debates on the South African NQF” (SAQA, 2005:43). Of the eight typological components<sup>2</sup>, *Scope* is of particular importance to this paper (see the definition below).

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<sup>2</sup> The eight typological components are: *Guiding philosophy* – the underlying thinking that implicitly, often covertly, underlies the development and implementation of the NQF; *Purpose* – the explicit, usually overt, reasons for the development and implementation of the NQF; *Scope* – the measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF; *Prescriptiveness* – the stringency of the criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included on the NQF; *Incrementalism* – rate and manner of implementation of the NQF; *Policy breadth* – extent to which an NQF is directly and explicitly linked with other measures that influence how the framework is used; *Architecture* – the configuration of structural arrangements that make up the design of the NQF; and *Governance* – all

I therefore propose the following:

Integration is an overarching term that refers to “make or be made into a whole”, to “amalgamate or mix”.

Integration can take place on at least two levels:

On an economic, political and societal level I use *Scope* to define the measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF.

In this context *Scope* refers to systemic coherence and, more often than not, to the relationship between educational and vocational subsystems. If all systems are integrated the *Scope* of the NQF is *unified*; if there are separate subsystem but with common structures for transferability the *Scope* is *linked*; if the subsystems are separate with limited transferability, the *Scope* is *tracked*.

On a qualifications, curriculum and pedagogical level I use *Integrability* to define the measure of integration of theoretical and practical components as contained in the qualification or curriculum.

This interpretation of *Integrability*<sup>3</sup> includes aspects such as epistemological considerations, the value of work-integrated learning, the value of theory and practice and philosophical influences. If a qualification/curriculum is fully integrated, i.e. both theoretical and practical learning is required, the qualification/curriculum is *unified*; if mostly theoretical learning is required the qualification/curriculum is *academic*; if mostly work-integrated learning is required the qualification/curriculum is *occupationally/vocationally/professionally directed*.

In this paper I use (and expand on) these interpretations of integration (*Scope* and *Integrability*) to critically reflect on the recent research conducted by the SAQA on professional qualifications within the context of the South African NQF. In my opinion the research on professional qualifications provides a unique, recent and most appropriate case study to consider the contribution of the NQF to the integration of workplace-based learning and theoretical learning – in effect to the quality of work-integrated learning<sup>4</sup>. Although this discussion is backgrounded by the second National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS 2) and the various challenges associated with meeting these targets (also

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activities that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage institutions, sectors or processes associated with the NQF (Keevy, 2005:125).

<sup>3</sup> I have hesitantly opted to introduce the new term *Integrability* as this was the only way I was able to distinguish between the current (mis)understandings of integration and what I am trying to convey.

<sup>4</sup> The CTP (2004:14) defines work-integrated learning as: “...a strategy of applied learning... which involves a structured academic programme that combines productive relevant work experience with academic study and ‘professional reflection’”.

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** I bridle at this sort of simplistic classification. At lower levels academic vs vocational/occupational/professional may be appropriate. But at higher levels Master plus the focus is occupational ie a researcher. (Strange that one would not consider a researcher to be a professional, is that just my prejudice. A researcher conforms to any definition of occupation. In addition to the theory the researcher needs to be able to motive, acquire and manage resources, manage work process, produce outputs, account to stakeholders, etc. Any notion that researchers lie under trees and get bliksemd by apples or sun beams depending on which century they are in is pure fiction. A research manger is just as any other manager. The inputs and the products may be different but the processes are the same. The clearer definition is between formative and vocational/ occupational/ professional learning programmes. The rest is incidental.

see Keevy, 2006), it focuses in particular on the role and impact of a *unified* NQF on work-integrated learning.

The paper is structured according to the three sections:

- Case study: empirical research on professional qualifications
- Towards a common understanding of integration, including a further refinement of the notions of *Scope* and *Integrability*
- Implications of a less integrated NQF for the quality of work-integrated learning.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Based on a non-experimental retrospective historical descriptive analysis of 55 survey responses (with a 42% response rate) from professional bodies<sup>5</sup>, 42 interviews with representatives from professional bodies and other stakeholders, 426 qualifications registered as “professional qualifications” on the NQF and related local and international literature, it was recommended that:

The NQF as an integrated framework<sup>6</sup> for all learning achievements should be an all-encompassing one and should therefore find the solutions that will *facilitate inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF* (SAQA, 2006:9, emphasis added).

It was also suggested that initially this recommendation be implemented on a voluntary basis in the case of non-statutory professional bodies until systems and processes have been sufficiently streamlined to facilitate the inclusion of the qualifications of smaller bodies. It was furthermore recommended that professional designations and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes should not be included on the NQF, although these could be recorded on the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD).

The research found that the vast majority of professional bodies (87%) require both an academic and workplace component in order for candidates to meet their registration requirements. In most cases (69%) a qualification holder is also professionally assessed or examined prior to registration – examples include entrance and board exams and professional interviews. The majority of professional bodies (87%) also require that

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<sup>5</sup> A *professional body* is a body appointed to represent a recognised 'community of expert practitioners' and as such it devises, informs, monitors and continually updates the benchmark standards of competence, both academic practical and ethical, required in the practice of the profession for which it is responsible. It is governed either by a statute or a constitution and has the necessary full-time resources to carry out its functions. Major functions include quality assurance, assessment of professional competence, the conferring of professional designations and the right to practice, development and management of a code of professional/ethical conduct and ensuring the currency of knowledge of members through the implementation and monitoring of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes (SAQA, 2006:21).

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term ‘integrated’ in this context refers to the *Scope* of the NQF and should rather, according to the terminology used in this paper, be replaced by ‘unified’.

individuals adhere to a code of ethics in order to retain professional status/designation<sup>7</sup>. Most (69%) professional bodies also require some form of CPD. Disciplinary processes and procedures to deal with ethical and other non-compliance issues are also commonplace.

In summary the research evidence suggested that a distinction exists between the following stages that sequentially lead to obtaining and retaining professional status:

<b>Stages towards obtaining and retaining professional status</b>	
Stage 1	<u>Theoretical learning</u> obtained through the completion of a qualification, including applied competence <sup>8</sup> , but with limited occupationally directed learning.
Stage 2	<u>Occupationally directed learning</u> obtained through workplace-based experience, sometimes as a unit standard or part of a qualification, but more often as non-formal training.
Stage 3	<u>Registration</u> with a professional body including granting of a professional designation and/or the right to practise – usually in the form of a professional assessment.
Stage 4	<u>Retention of professional status</u> - mainly through adherence to the requirements of the particular professional body such as CPD, code of conduct (ethics), continuing engagement in the practice of the profession and payment of fees.

Table 1: Stages towards obtaining and retaining professional status

While Stages 3 and 4 were reasonably well understood and applied in a uniform manner by professional bodies, Stages 1 and 2 were less well defined and often conflated by both professional bodies and within qualifications. To make matters worse, in the case of professional qualifications, and possibly even on a wider scale, these qualification types were inconsistently allocated, resulting in acute confusion in the marketplace about what a professional qualification is, as noted in the research report:

Only 29% of the qualifications currently registered as professional come close to the definition devised for a professional qualification. Few of these fit the complete and precise requirements for registration with professional bodies. In addition there was no apparent consistency in the process of classifying qualifications as professional, there is currently little consistency in the information contained in the qualifications and this is complicated by the fact that

Christoph Vorwerk  
**Comment:** What is this definition – I have looked back but can't find any sort of 'definition' of professional qualifications

<sup>7</sup> A *professional designation* is a title/status that is conferred by a Professional Body, which indicates the professional status of the individual and the right to practise in the particular field of expertise governed by that Body. Retention of this status is dependent upon compliance with the stated requirements of the Body concerned. These would typically include compliance with a Code of Professional Conduct, compliance with Continuing Professional Development requirements and the payment of fees. An important corollary to this is that a designation is not a permanent status and may be revoked if non-compliance with any of the specified requirements occurs (SAQA, 2006:26).

<sup>8</sup> The notion of applied competence implies that a qualification must address both the 'theory' needs as well as the practical needs of learners. A qualifying learner must be able to understand as well as do something useful with the knowledge, in a real-world context... (SAQA, 2000:16).

not all the criteria for professional qualification is required in the structuring of qualifications...(SAQA, 2006:43).

As a result of the identified confusion the research included an attempt at making a distinction between an *academic qualification* (also referred to as “general”, “generic” or “general formative” qualifications) and a *professional qualification* (also referred to as “occupationally directed” or a “qualification specialisation”). Based on the definition of a qualification as found in the NSB Regulations (SA, 1998)<sup>9</sup> these differences and similarities are summarised in the table below.

Academic qualification	Professional qualification
Discipline-based, generic or formative qualification	Occupationally-directed, qualification specialisation
May incorporate combinations of subjects and some practical exposure (generally in a simulated environment)	Includes all learning and professional competency standards that are required (specific to a particular profession)
Develops analytical and general skills	Develops specialist skills required for specific professions
Awarded permanently and cannot be revoked	Awarded permanently and cannot be revoked
Stage 1 (Theoretical learning)	Combination of Stage 1 (Theoretical learning) and Stage 2 (Occupationally-directed learning), but <i>excludes</i> Stage 3 (Registration) and Stage 4 (Retention of professional status)

**Christoph Vorwerk**  
**Comment:** This is where I would disagree. In the HEQF document they talk of a person being qualified “in” - this the academic qualification. For a professional/occupational qualification people would view professionals as qualified “to”. The “to” can be revoked. The “in” cannot. The “in” refers to a body of knowledge; the “to” refers to a body of practice. This for me is the key difference between qualification as designation.

Table 2: Differences and similarities between academic and professional qualifications

In summary, it was suggested that a professional qualification be interpreted as follows:

A *professional qualification* is occupationally directed and incorporates the specific requirements for achievement of expert practice as specified by the

<sup>9</sup> A qualification shall- (a) represent a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, and which is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning; (b) add value to the qualifying learner in terms of enrichment of the person through the: provision of status, recognition, credentials and licensing; enhancement of marketability and employability; and opening-up of access routes to additional education and training; (c) provide benefits to society and the economy through enhancing citizenship, increasing social and economic productivity, providing specifically skilled/professional people and transforming and redressing legacies of inequity; (d) comply with the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework contained in section 2 of the Act; (e) have both specific and critical cross-field outcomes which promote life-long learning; (f) where applicable, be internationally comparable; (g) incorporate integrated assessment appropriately to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved, and such assessment shall use a range of formative and summative assessment methods such as portfolios, simulations, work-place assessments, written and oral examinations; and (h) indicate in the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience.

relevant professional body. It includes all learning and professional competency standards that are required for professional registration with a professional body, and the subsequent right to use of a professional designation as well as the right to practise<sup>10</sup> in a specific field. *By definition a professional qualification can be described as a "specialist qualification type" and as such, and unlike a designation, it is awarded permanently and cannot be revoked* (SAQA, 2006:25, emphasis in the original).

From the research it is evident that the inconsistent application of criteria for professional qualifications has resulted in confusion between the roles of SAQA and professional bodies. This is most evident in the 426 qualifications currently registered as “professional” on the NQF: some of these include both the first and second stages towards obtaining professional status, some only the first, some only the second, while others include three or more stages. Likewise there are numerous qualifications that are not currently classified as professional (i.e. that are not part of the 426) that could be classified as professional.

Having made a brief summary of the research on professional qualifications, I am of the opinion that two aspects stand out as being very relevant to the quality of work-integrated learning in South Africa:

#### *Common understanding of integration*

The research did not question the unified *Scope* of the NQF. Surely integration lies at the very core of work-integrated learning, but do we have common agreement on what we mean by integration? Is integration about levels? About sectors? About types of qualifications? Or is integration about the extent to which the curriculum factors workplace-based learning into academic courses?

#### *The implications of including professional qualifications on the NQF to work-integrated learning*

If professional qualifications are included on the NQF, with a very particular “mix” of theoretical and workplace-based learning, how would this impact on other “types” of qualifications? Does this imply that non-professional/academic/generic qualifications will be less integrated than professional qualifications?

In the next section I discuss the first aspect, namely the different understandings of integration. I have left the second more overarching aspect to the final section of this paper.

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** The sad fact is that this very distinction is the root of many arguments at lower levels of the NQF – this is the distinction between occupation and job; between task and competence. There are so many ETQA managers who are interpreting qualifications on the NQF as being the training for a job ie conformance, and not the requirements for competence either occupational and trade.

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** This is a very telling comment – this speaks to the NQF objectives, particularly 2. Facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** At this point I despair. Isn't one the most obvious forms of integration the degree to which teaching ie knowledge and theory, is integrated into practice and the degree to which practice reflects on theory and knowledge. In a learner-centred system (the NQF as an integrated national framework for learning achievements) where the learner's competence is an outcome of curriculum, not the curriculum in itself.

<sup>10</sup> The term ‘right to practise’ as opposed to ‘licence to practise’ is used to cater for both Statutory and Non-statutory Bodies.

## TOWARDS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF INTEGRATION

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper it has been suggested that the measure of integration of an NQF can be described by using the notion of *Scope*, i.e. “the measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF” (Keevy, 2005:125). Further expanding this interpretation, as developed by Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin (2000 in Keevy, 2005:148), suggests that most NQFs fit into one of three categories, each based on a different relationship between education and vocational systems:

- *unified* (all systems are integrated);
- *linked* (separate systems but with common structures for transferability); and
- *tracked* (separate systems with limited transferability).

Based on this classification, Raffe (2005) agrees that the South African NQF is *unified*, but cautions that at the heart of this debate lies a paradox:

On the one hand, many countries, including South Africa, introduce such frameworks in order to *transform aspects of their education and training system*, their society, or their economy. On the other hand, the literature on qualifications frameworks suggests that they are most successful when they are modest in ambition and incremental in approach: when they build upon existing structures and practices and on the trust, the mutual understandings and the power relationships that are embedded within them. In other words, it would seem, the frameworks that are judged to be most successful are those which succeed in transforming very little (2005:1, emphasis added).

Going further Raffe (ibid.) argues that integration is not an end in itself, but rather a means to other ends. In effect, this implies that, in order to achieve its transformative purpose, the South African NQF (see emphasis in the text above) has had to follow an integrative approach<sup>11</sup>. Importantly Raffe adds the reason for the apparent paradox: the more radical an NQF, the less likely it is to be judged successful. As this is another debate that is most probably better suited elsewhere so I will not pursue it in this paper; suffice to say that there is a particular understanding of integration associated with NQFs – an understanding that is based mainly on the relationships between educational and vocational systems.

Of more importance to this paper, Raffe (2002), in earlier work, and in a discussion on measures that can be employed to bring about greater unification, suggests three measures to bring academic and vocational learning closer together (from Keevy, 2005:149): measures that aim to unify academic and vocational *curricula*; measures that aim to reduce the *organisational* distance between academic and vocational learning; and measures that aim to reduce the distance between vocational and academic learning in

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<sup>11</sup> Reference to an “integrated approach” has a very particular meaning within the South African context and although this debate is relevant to this paper I have opted to exclude it to avoid further complicating the discussion. See Heyns and Needham (2004).

*longitudinal* terms. It is clear from Raffe's suggestions and the preceding discussion that integration does not exist on only a systems level (i.e. the NQF). As first suggested by Heyns and Needham (2004)<sup>12</sup>, and considering Raffe's unifying measures, I suggest that there are at least two axes (or levels or dimensions) of integration:

On an economic, political and societal level

I propose using *Scope* to define the *measure of integration of levels, sectors and types of qualifications as well as the relationships between each on the NQF*. In this context *Scope* refers to systemic coherence and, more often than not, to the relationship between educational and vocational subsystems. If all systems are integrated the *Scope* of the NQF is *unified*; if there are separate subsystem but with common structures for transferability the *Scope* is *linked*; if the subsystems are separate with limited transferability, the *Scope* is *tracked*.

On a qualifications, curriculum and pedagogical level

I propose using *Integrability* to define the *measure of integration of theoretical and practical components as contained in the qualification or curriculum*. This interpretation of *Integrability* includes aspects such as epistemological considerations, the value of work-integrated learning, the value of theory and practice and philosophical influences. If a qualification/curriculum is fully integrated, i.e. both theoretical and practical learning is required, the qualification/curriculum is *unified*; if mostly theoretical learning is required the qualification/curriculum is *academic*; if mostly work-integrated learning is required the qualification/curriculum is *occupationally/vocationally/ professionally directed*.

The matrix below illustrates the two axes of integration:

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<sup>12</sup> Heyns and Needham (2004) suggest three levels: *macro level* – the socio-political or systemic level; *meso level* – philosophical and epistemological issues; and *micro level* – integration as experienced by education and training practitioners.

Economic, political and societal level (NQF) Scope	Unified	LIMITED #1	YES #2	LIMITED #3
	Linked	YES #4	LIMITED #5	YES #6
	Tracked	YES #7	NO #8	YES #9
		Academic	Unified	Occupationally directed

## Integrability

Qualifications, curriculum and pedagogical level

Diagram 1: Systems and Qualifications axes of integration

In the matrix I have tried to show that, in my view:

- An NQF with a unified *Scope* will mostly include qualifications that have both theoretical and occupationally directed components, i.e. qualifications with a unified *Integrability* (#2), but will also, at least to some extent, be able to include qualifications with academic and occupationally-directed *Integrability* (#1 and #3).
- An NQF with a linked *Scope*, having three separate but interrelated tracks (e.g. academic, vocational and occupational), will be able to accommodate diverse qualifications, even qualifications with a unified *Integrability* (#4, #5 and #6). In cases where qualifications have a too low theoretical or too low occupational component, there is always the possibility of adding additional learning opportunities during curriculum development.
- An NQF with a tracked *Scope*, on the other hand, will have greater difficulty in accommodating qualifications that have both theoretical and occupationally directed components (i.e. qualifications with a unified *Integrability*) (#8), as the very nature of the tracks (with limited articulation between them) will favour either a theoretical or occupational emphasis (#7 and #9).

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** All of this makes me feel uncomfortable. It is what I would term lego balck arguments. If we accept in the intrinsic purse of the NQF is to empower learners, it would be much better to frame these arguments in terms of what learners experience. Does the learning link to reality or does it postulate an idea? Does the curriculum integrate ideas and reality/encourage reflection/teach it as reality?. All the other arguments are really pseudo-reality. Now read what follows...

As a final point related to integration, it is important to reflect where the South African NQF is at present. According to the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995), one of the purposes of the NQF is to “create an integrated national framework for learning achievements” (SA, 1995). As mentioned earlier, the interpretation of this objective has always been contested, ranging from a somewhat less aggressive ‘integrative approach’ that would be well suited to a unified NQF, to a much looser interpretation akin to a tracked NQF. In short, the measure of integration of the NQF has been largely open to interpretation by NQF stakeholders. SAQA, on the other hand, has consistently argued that the ‘integrated framework’ is rooted in a socio-political decision taken prior to the NQF’s establishment – “a framework where disparities of esteem are reduced” (Heyns and Needham, 2004) – in effect arguing for an NQF with a unified *Scope*.

According to Heyns and Needham (ibid.) this included disparities between:

- formal education institutions and workplaces (formal/non-formal divide) – a debate that has traditionally centred around the lack of work-integrated learning in academic qualifications, and the lack of the theory in occupationally directed qualifications; and
- different institutions (e.g. historically disadvantaged and advantaged).

Heyns and Needham (2004:35) conclude their discussion on macro level issues by making an important observation:

...“an integrated framework” or “an integrated approach” were not only understood in a *socio-political* or in a *systemic* sense, but stood proxy for other deeply rooted ideas about the very nature and purpose of learning.

Returning to the point of this discussion, how integrated is the NQF at present? In my opinion the South African NQF may have been conceptualised as a unified framework during the initial stages (see, for example HSRC, 1995), that is an attempt was made to integrate all systems. The overriding intentions, however, were issues of redress, access and mobility, and parity of esteem. Furthermore, as noted by Heyns and Needham (2004), integration also stood proxy for underlying pedagogical theories. All in all, the emphasis placed on a unified framework (generally interpreted as a integrated framework) has veiled the possibility for the NQF to be linked (that is to have separate systems but with common structures that facilitate mobility and access). In my opinion, and based on a reading of recent literature including departmental discussion documents (such as DoE and DoL, 2002 and DoE and DoL, 2003), the South African NQF is gradually moving towards such a linked *Scope*. According to proponents of such a linked *Scope*, a linked NQF will still purpose to transform and redress the education and training system; a linked NQF will be better able to include diverse qualifications types (such as those with different combinations of workplace-based and theoretical learning – see the earlier discussion on professional qualifications as an example).

Christoph Vorwerk

**Comment:** As an indirect participant in these ‘negotiations, I would not read too much into the ‘linked’ proposition. Linked was the last desperate effort to retain some sort of integration in the system. Education’s view was that only institutions provide what has to be learned- labours view was that both education and practice were needed – one without the other did not work; The preferential logic of academia – classificatory logic, ie either – or. Made that a difficult proposition. So linked was a life belt thrown out as the Titanic was sinking. Linking is simply a way of depicting learning processes. Integration of learning is still required of the learner.

## CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

I leave this discussion on the evolution of the NQF open-ended as I think much more thought needs to be put into this. I hope that at least I have been able to identify two handles (*Scope* and *Integrability*) that will make such a debate more focused and constructive. I do however want to conclude by summarising three points arising from this discussion on the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF:

Firstly, in my opinion, recognising professional qualifications as a distinct qualifications type on the NQF (see the earlier definition) may constitute a first step towards a linked NQF. As was explained earlier, a linked, rather than a unified NQF, will be better able to accommodate different types of qualifications and still retain some measure of integration.

Secondly, and here I need to tread carefully, I am of the opinion that the South African NQF was never completely unified, and that because of a limited understanding of integration on a systems (economical, political and societal) level, the NQF has necessarily evolved to a linked system. Importantly though, I agree with Raffé's earlier comments about the transformative purpose of the South African NQF and that a more unified NQF, whether misunderstood at the time or not, has been absolutely necessary during the first decade of our new democracy.

Lastly, must all qualifications on the NQF be strongly work-integrated? Not necessarily. In my opinion, within an NQF with a linked *Scope*, it is possible to accommodate qualifications with diverse *Integrability*: qualifications that are mainly theoretical (generic or academic); qualifications that are highly occupationally directed (such as professional qualifications); as well as unified qualifications, without compromising parity of esteem. Together with appropriate curriculum development<sup>13</sup>, all qualifications on a linked NQF can be tailored to suit the needs of both academia and the workplace while continuing to facilitate access, mobility and progression and appropriate levels of work-integrated learning.

As a final note I need to re-emphasise that this paper is a work in progress. The paper reflects my own opinion and has been developed to support the continued and effective development and implementation of the NQF in South Africa.

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<sup>13</sup> See Young (2006) for a most relevant discussion on the development of *unified* curricula that try to bridge the traditional divisions between education and training. In his paper, Young argues that from his experience in the United Kingdom such attempts may have been misguided.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge the contributions of Ronel Blom, Christoph Vorwerk and David Raffe during the development of this paper. Although they may not agree fully with the position I have taken, their constructive engagement on these matters were of particular value. In particular, Christoph Vorwerk makes a strong argument for *not* making a separate characterisation of trades, occupations and professions *vs.* academics. In his view 'trying to split the NQF along academic/occupational lines is a false dichotomy'. David Raffe, on the other hand, prefers to use the looser term "unified framework" as a principle for coordinating diversity, and asks where the dimension of "prescriptiveness" fits in.

It is clear that there is still much to be said in this debate.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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