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**Learning from the first qualifications
frameworks**

Stephanie Allais, David Raffe, Rob Strathdee,
Leesa Wheelahan, Michael Young

Preface

The primary goal of the ILO is to contribute, with member States, to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people, a goal embedded in the ILO Declaration 2008 on *Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*,[1] and which has now been widely adopted by the international community.

In order to support member States and the social partners to reach the goal, the ILO pursues a Decent Work Agenda which comprises four interrelated areas: Respect for fundamental worker's rights and international labour standards, employment promotion, social protection and social dialogue. Explanations of this integrated approach and related challenges are contained in a number of key documents: in those explaining and elaborating the concept of decent work,[2] in the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), and in the Global Employment Agenda.

The Global Employment Agenda was developed by the ILO through tripartite consensus of its Governing Body's Employment and Social Policy Committee. Since its adoption in 2003 it has been further articulated and made more operational and today it constitutes the basic framework through which the ILO pursues the objective of placing employment at the centre of economic and social policies.[3]

The Employment Sector is fully engaged in the implementation of the Global Employment Agenda, and is doing so through a large range of technical support and capacity building activities, advisory services and policy research. As part of its research and publications programme, the Employment Sector promotes knowledge-generation around key policy issues and topics conforming to the core elements of the Global Employment Agenda and the Decent Work Agenda. The Sector's publications consist of books, monographs, working papers, employment reports and policy briefs.[4]

The *Employment Working Papers* series is designed to disseminate the main findings of research initiatives undertaken by the various departments and programmes of the Sector. The working papers are intended to encourage exchange of ideas and to stimulate debate. The views expressed are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the ILO.

José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs
Executive Director
Employment Sector

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[1] See http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/dgo/download/dg_announce_en.pdf

[2] See the successive Reports of the Director-General to the International Labour Conference: *Decent work* (1999); *Reducing the decent work deficit: A global challenge* (2001); *Working out of poverty* (2003).

[3] See http://www.ilo.org/gea. And in particular: Implementing the Global Employment Agenda: Employment strategies in support of decent work, "Vision" document, ILO, 2006.

[4] See http://www.ilo.org/employment.

Foreword

According to an ILO survey, some 70 countries are in the process of developing or implementing some kind of a qualifications framework. A framework is intended to improve understanding of qualifications (degrees, certificates, or recognition of experiential-based learning) in terms of the information they convey to an employer about prospective workers' competencies. Frameworks are also intended to explain how qualifications relate to each other and thus can be combined to build pathways within and across occupations and education and training sectors. Many countries are trying to improve the relevance, quality and flexibility of their education and training systems, and many of them are looking to qualification frameworks as a tool for bringing about this reform. Development of national qualification frameworks (NQFs) are also motivated by the emergence of regional frameworks, such as in Europe or in the Caribbean, which aim to help employers and institutions of higher education recognize the equivalency of qualifications earned in different countries. With these goals in mind, the development of NQFs has been widely supported by multilateral and bilateral agencies.

However, very little has been documented about the effectiveness of NQFs in bringing about change in skills development systems or about their actual use by employers, workers, and training providers. In 2009, the ILO's Skills and Employability Department launched its Qualifications Framework Research Project to study the impact and implementation of NQFs in developing countries to help fill this knowledge gap and to be able to provide more evidence-based advice to member States.

The research programme, comprising some 17 country case studies and a review of academic literature on the NQFs, provides an international comparison of the design and purpose of NQFs in developing countries and an empirical analysis of their use and impact based on the experience of those involved in their design and use. The study aims to understand to what extent establishing an NQF is the best strategy for achieving a country's desired policy objectives, what approaches to qualifications frameworks and their implementation are most appropriate in which contexts and for which purposes, what level of resources (human and other) and what complimentary policies might be required to achieve the policy objectives associated with them, and what might be a realistic assessment of the likely outcomes.

This working paper comprises five case studies conducted as part of the research. Chapter 1 on the National Vocational Qualifications in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, was written by Professor Michael Young (Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Education, University of London). Chapter 2 on the NQF in Scotland was written by David Raffe (Professor of Sociology of Education, University of Edinburgh). Chapter 3 on the NQF in New Zealand was written by Dr. Rob Strathdee (head of School of Education Policy and Implementation at the University of Wellington). Chapter 4 on the NQF in Australia was written by Dr. Leesa Wheelahan (Senior Lecturer in Adult and Vocational Education at Griffiths University). Chapter 5 was written by Stephanie Allais (now postdoctoral fellow at the University of Edinburgh). A companion working paper (No. 44) (Allais et al. 2009), *Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues*, addresses some of the fundamental conceptual issues involved in research on NQFs in order to broaden the debate about their role in skills systems. A full analysis of the new case studies and the policy lessons derived from them is forthcoming in 2010.

As a Research Associate in the Skills and Employability Department, Dr. Stephanie Allais has led the development of the research and overseen the country studies. Professor Michael Young has served as senior research advisor, and Professor David Raffe gave advice and support to the project. The research programme has been carried out in cooperation with the European Training Foundation. I would also like to thank Jo-Ann Bakker for preparing the manuscript for publication.

Christine Evans-Klock
Director
Skills and Employability Department

Abbreviations

General

APEL	accreditation of experiential learning
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ET	Education and training
ETF	European Training Foundation
NQFs	national qualifications frameworks
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training

Ch. 1 – United Kingdom

AAT	Association of Accounting Technicians
APEL	accreditation of experiential learning
CATERBASE	Hospitality and Catering Employers Training Organization
CGLI	City and Guilds of London Institute
DfID	Department for International Development
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
HRD	human resources development
NCVQ	the National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NHS	National Health Service
QCF	English Qualification and Credit Framework
RVQ	The Review of Vocational Qualifications
SKOPE	Skills, Knowledge and Organizational Performance Project (University of Cardiff)
YT	Youth Training
YTS	Youth Training Scheme

Ch. 2 – Scotland

ACDP	Advanced Courses Development Programme
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
COSHEP	Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals
ECVET	European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
HEIs	higher education institutions
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
ITC	Information and Communication Technology
NC	National Certificate
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
SACCA	Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SCOTCAT	Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme
SDS	Skills Development Scotland
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SQVs	Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Ch. 3 – New Zealand

GIF	Growth and Innovation Framework
ITF	Industry Training Federation
ITOs	Industry Training Organisations
NCEA	National Certificate of Educational Achievement
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
PCET	Post Compulsory Education and Training
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEAC	Tertiary Education Advisory Commission

Ch. 4 – Australia

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACTU	Australian Council for Trade Unions
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQFAB	Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board (replaced by the AQFC in May 2008)
AQFC	Australian Qualifications Framework Council
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
ARF	Australian Recognition Framework
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CAEs	Colleges of Advanced Education
CBT	Competency-based training
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses
CTEC	Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (the Commonwealth department with responsibility for education and training, among other things)
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training (the Commonwealth Department with responsibility for education and training under the conservative Howard Government).
ESFC	Employment and Skills Formation Council
EFTSL	Equivalent Full-Time Student Loads
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HEP	Higher Education Provider
ISCs	Industry Skills Councils
ITABs	Industry Training Advisory Bodies
MCTEE	Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MCEEDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCVTE	Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NFROT	National Framework for the Recognition of Training
NISC	National Industry Skills Council
NQC	National Quality Council
NTB	National Training Board
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RTO	Registered Training Organization
TAFE	Technical and Further Education (institutes that are the public providers of VET)
TAPEC	Technical and Further Education Council
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
ZMTs	zones of mutual trust

Ch. 5 - South Africa

ABCE	Adult Basic Certificate of Education
ANC	African National Congress
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance
FET	Further Education and Training colleges
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
NECC	National Education Co-ordinating Committee
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NLRD	National Learner Records Database (SAQA's)
NOPF	National Occupational Pathways Framework
NSBs	National Standards Bodies
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NTB	National Training Board
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
OFOs	Organizing Framework for Occupations
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications (England and Wales)
PALCs	Public Adult Learning Centres
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETAs	Sectoral Education and Training Authorities
SGBs	Standards Generating Bodies
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Contents

Introduction - Stephanie Allais, Michael Young, and David Raffe

Five countries have been in the forefront of the development of NQFs. They are variously referred to as 'first generation NQFs', or 'early starters'. This working paper brings together case studies of these five countries, in the hope that it will assist policy-makers and researchers to learn from other experiences. The case studies offer insights into the nature of the qualifications frameworks in the countries, the processes of implementation, and the successes, failures, and problems experienced.

New Zealand had the first ever officially-titled "National Qualifications Framework", followed closely by Australia and South Africa. Scotland can be seen as both preceding these three countries, as the qualifications and other systemic reforms which laid the basis for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) began in the 1980s, but also as following them in terms of the formal introduction of the national framework in 2001. Shortly after the first of the Scottish reforms, in 1987, the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were launched in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The NVQs have been used as the model for many qualifications frameworks around the world. The histories of these five frameworks are important: their different origins and aims, how the frameworks were implemented, what changed as implementation progressed, and what, looking back, was achieved. They are important because despite substantial differences between them, and despite limited evidence of what qualifications frameworks have actually achieved, policy-makers in 'later starter' countries have tended to see the five 'early starters' as a common model to follow.[5]

Policy-makers in the countries in the five case studies were all trying to improve the ways in which qualifications related to each other (by, among other things, establishing pathways between qualifications) and to make them more understandable and better meet the needs of users. The particular users focused on, tended to be employers on the one hand and learners least likely to achieve qualifications on the other. Policy-makers also hoped a qualification framework would stimulate and increase the quality and quantity of education provided, make educational institutions more accountable, and facilitate the recognition of learning that took place outside of educational institutions, particularly in workplaces. In different ways, and for different reasons, qualifications frameworks were seen as policies which could lead to, or contribute to, some or all of these goals.

Subsequently, the idea of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, which has its origins in these developments in the 1980s and 1990s in England, New

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[5] A gap in this collection of case studies is that of France, which could provide a very different way of designing and implementing a qualifications framework. France, although a latecomer to the NQF policy world, arguably has had an NQF in development for many years, and the French model may be influential in Europe and elsewhere in the world. This is something which we will attempt to understand through the course of the remainder of the research project.

Zealand, Scotland, and South Africa, as well as in the competency-based training (CBT) model of vocational education in Australia,[6] has been rapidly spreading around the world. NQFs have been the object of considerable policy borrowing internationally. Governments and policy-makers wanting to achieve similar goals have taken up the idea. Models, titles and formats of qualifications, level descriptors, statements of competence or unit standards, structures, processes, and sometimes entire NQFs are 'borrowed'.

The borrowing country tries to replicate what it saw in the original country, sometimes adapting it, usually because official documents in the origin country make strong claims about what policy-makers hope will be achieved. But, in most instances, what is not available from the official documents, or even easily found out, by the policy borrower, is whether or not any of the aims of the NQF in the origin country were achieved. If some of the goals have been achieved, what is also not apparent from official documents is what led to success - what were the conditions, contexts, other policies in place, processes, and so on, in the origin country.

Often, as Michael Young points out in Chapter 1, a policy is designed to overcome or alleviate particular problems that have arisen in a particular historical and political context. But, when aspects of the policy are adopted elsewhere, these contextual factors are easily forgotten or remain unknown. As David Raffe illustrates in Chapter 2, the Scottish framework has gained "an almost moral authority among NQFs". Aspects of the Scottish framework are used (sometimes in an adapted form) around the world - for example, the Scottish level descriptors. But what appears in an official policy document will inevitably play itself out in different ways in different contexts. For example, in addition to the fact that the Scottish qualifications framework was developed incrementally, over a very long period of time, as is discussed in Chapter 2, it was developed in a *context* with strong institutions, a relatively strong economy, and relatively high employment, especially compared to many of the developing countries which are now attempting to develop NQFs. Scotland also has a small population (about 5 million) and a relatively small and homogenous policy community. The development of the qualifications framework was strongly driven by educational institutions. Level descriptors developed by the people who actually use them are more likely to be trusted, and are likely to mean something to the users, not because of how well they are articulated on paper, but because of the shared process engaged in arriving at them. Taking official documents on their own is unlikely to replicate the Scottish successes. In countries with larger populations and greater diversity and contestation among stakeholders and policy-makers, the consensus which was the basis on which agreement on the framework was achieved in Scotland may be very hard to replicate. The problem is that statements such as level descriptors are so open to interpretation that they can become meaningless. Their impact therefore depends on the context in which they are generated and in which they are interpreted and used. Chapter 5, the South African study, references key stakeholders openly stating that the level descriptors play no useful role in their work.

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[6] The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) consists of qualifications from the senior school, vocational education and training, and higher education sectors; the vocational education and training qualifications are based on CBT.

In addition, countries which 'borrow' or adapt the Scottish level descriptors, without directing energy and resources at improving the quality of their institutions, or without providing financial support for students to access education, may find that they do not play the role in improving educational standards or levels of qualifying learners that they had hoped.

It is understandable that official documents do not capture for the outside world the debates, conflicts, and problems experienced in their country. But, from the point of view of policy borrowing, the consequence is that the policy borrower often does not see the problems. An important lesson from all of the five studies in this working paper is that things are 'never as they seem'. Often what is borrowed is a snapshot of a moving target. NQFs are complex, dynamic, and evolving policy instruments. NQFs in all the countries in this working paper have been criticized. Criticisms have led to successive policy reviews and evaluations which relate to the qualifications frameworks in various ways. All the NQFs have seen changes and developments and in some cases very substantial changes. This is important because often what is 'borrowed' or 'learnt from' another country is the model as it is described on paper at a particular time and the desirable goals associated with it, and not the model as it was implemented in practice with all the problems, experiences, and changes made to the model along the way. Official documents and accounts often do not reflect that there have been real changes in the model since it was first launched. This is understandable - such documents are aimed at practitioners and users within a country, and need to provide up-to-date information about how the qualifications framework is supposed to work. But they may inadvertently create misleading impressions for those borrowing from the policies, particularly as the language used (such terms as "learning outcomes") may remain similar through substantial shifts, as can be seen in New Zealand and South Africa.

Policy borrowing can be dangerous, especially without the full picture in the country that is being borrowed from, and careful consideration of differences in contexts. While official policy documents from all four countries use the language of learning outcomes, they do not all mean the same thing and they do not reflect the different views held about outcomes within the country. These differences are then not understood by those looking to borrow or learn from the official documents and put them into practice. This is compounded by the fact that qualifications frameworks clearly touch on important power relations in each country, whereas official reports tend to be political documents, designed to present a consensus.

The qualifications frameworks in the five studies continue to be 'borrowed' or learnt from by other countries around the world as they attempt to develop their own qualifications frameworks. This working paper hopes to encourage and assist with policy *learning*, as opposed to policy borrowing. By providing five reasonably detailed studies, which draw on research, analyses, and official documentation available in the countries, they provide perspectives, insights, and analysis which we hope will be useful, especially for those involved in deciding whether and/or how to introduce a qualifications framework. They do not provide simple 'how to do it' tips, nor do they even provide straightforward or simple lessons, such as 'these are the five points to bear in mind'.

They show that there is great diversity in the types of policies which go by the name of an NQF. They also show that understanding what is involved in qualifications reform and its likely consequences is complicated. There are few, if any, places in which successes and failures of the framework are brought

together in a clear and accessible format for practitioners and policy-makers in the countries themselves, or in other countries, to learn from. What constitutes success is also contested, and it is difficult to clearly argue whether or not a success can be seen as due to the NQF or to other policy or institutional reforms. For example, Chapter 2 on Scotland points out that much of what is perceived as the achievements of the Scottish NQF can be attributed not to the framework *per se*, but to the series of reforms which preceded it. Many of the achievements of the Scottish NQF can be seen as the achievements of the sub-frameworks, although Raffe argues that there has also been value added by bringing them together in a single framework. Thus, the lessons of the sequence of reforms that preceded the SCQF are part of the lessons to be drawn from the Scottish experience.

Strong claims continue to be made about what NQFs can do. If policy-makers in other countries are to learn from the experience of the first qualifications frameworks, it is necessary to have some sense of whether they have in fact achieved their objectives, and how. One way of understanding the possible achievements of a framework is, as Raffe argues, through investigating how it has been *used* - how effectively, and by whom? These five case studies offer accounts of the different uses to which qualifications frameworks have been put, as well as indications of where various stakeholders and role players felt that they were unable to use them. The studies are presented in five chapters, in a roughly chronological order, followed by a concluding chapter, which draws out some of the main lessons from them. We hope that policy-makers and researchers will be able to make the time to read them, as each tells a unique story.

Chapter 1: National Vocational Qualifications in the United Kingdom: Their origins and legacy
- Michael Young

1.   Introduction

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were launched in the United Kingdom (excluding Scotland)[7] in 1987 as a framework for rationalizing what was described at the time as the 'jungle' of existing vocational qualifications. They were never intended to be the basis for a comprehensive NQF for all qualifications;[8] however, successive governments were committed to using them to replace all other *vocational* qualifications, especially those which involved government funding.

NVQs are still used in the United Kingdom, although the original NVQ model has been changed many times. Those countries which have drawn on the example of NVQs would no doubt claim that they had learned lessons from mistakes made by the United Kingdom and the exaggerated claims made for the original model.

Why then, in a project concerned with NQFs in 2009, is it worth looking back over 20 years at the origins of NVQs? This chapter begins by suggesting some reasons why countries currently involved in introducing an NQF might find it useful to consider the origins and legacy of NVQs.

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[7] A slightly different version of NVQs, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) was launched in Scotland at a similar time. This chapter is restricted to a consideration of NVQs.

[8] Gilbert Jessup, Deputy Chief Executive of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) (the body responsible for NVQs) had more ambitious aims that the NVQ model could be a basis for all qualifications (Jessup 1991). However, this proposal never gained widespread support.

1. NVQs were the first national attempt to base vocational qualifications on the idea of competence.[9]

2. NVQs remain, over 20 years later, the most widely known, widely-copied and most heavily-criticized model for a vocational qualifications framework in the world.

A qualifications framework, like any other instrument of educational policy, is always introduced in order to overcome or alleviate particular problems that have arisen in a particular historical and political context. However, when a similar model is adopted elsewhere, these contextual features are easily forgotten. A consideration of the origins of the first outcomes-based model for NVQs may therefore shed light on issues which are under-emphasized or even obscured in current policies and make explain the problems facing those involved in implementation.

3. Some later versions of outcomes-based NQFs have taken on the criticisms of the NVQ approach. An example is the decision to base the NQF on outcomes, not competence in South Africa (Kraak 2001). However, the idea that qualifications could be expressed as 'written outcomes' expressed independently of the learning processes leading to them that was central to NVQs, has been a feature of all NQFs, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis. Understanding exactly what this emphasis on outcomes means and finding out how and in what way "written outcomes" are used in different countries is part of what this Project is about. In many cases, especially in developing countries, 'written outcomes' appear to be used in ways that are almost indistinguishable from that originally proposed for NVQs.

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[9] NVQs were, of course, also the first NQFs in which qualifications were defined solely in terms of learning outcomes. Some clarification is needed about the relationship between the two terms 'competence' and 'outcomes'. Whereas "competence" implies a reference to what someone can 'do' rather than what they know, and hence tends to be limited to vocational and professional qualifications, "outcomes" is a broader and more general term that includes the idea of competence; it emerged to overcome the tendency of traditional qualifications to overemphasize inputs such as syllabuses and necessary learning time.

It follows that whereas the idea of competence is associated with the requirements of workplaces, the idea of outcomes is used to refer to 'what someone knows' and to express the broader goals of general education.

There are, however, two reasons why the two terms have become almost synonymous in recent policy documents. Firstly, they are both expressions of the increasingly instrumental approach to education on the part of governments. Such approaches emphasize that learning is less and less 'an end in itself 'but a means to another 'end', such as employability. This 'instrumentalism is symbolized in the much quoted claim by the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, that "education is the best economic policy that we have". Secondly, and relatedly, the two ideas are becoming blurred as more emphasis is placed on the economic benefits of general, as well as vocational, education.

4. It is not insignificant that NVQs originated in the United Kingdom, one of the ten richest countries in the world, with an education system that has been seen, for better or worse, as a model for others to copy, especially in the former British colonies. Furthermore, this exemplar role of NVQs has been given greater significance by the energetic way that the model has been publicized and marketed by the British Council, DfID (Department for International Development) and various UK-based Awarding Bodies, such as the City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI).

5. The NVQ outcomes model fits neatly into the English tradition of Awarding and Examining Bodies which are relatively autonomous from both the State and from colleges, schools and other providers of learning programmes. NVQs were designed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and a government agency in association with employer-led sectoral bodies. However, they were 'owned' by Awarding Bodies who appointed internal and external verifiers to oversee assessment, thus providing a readymade model for assessing learning outcomes independently of learning processes.

6. Despite the many criticisms (Hyland 1994; Smithers 1999; West 2004; Wolf 1995), NVQs have not been without their 'successes' in particular sectors. Two examples of these will be discussed later in this chapter. I shall argue that these 'successes' do not answer the criticisms of the NVQ model. However, they do suggest an alternative approach to the role of qualifications (and qualification frameworks) in the reform of vocational education and in supporting skill development - issues that are at the heart of this Project.

My argument for examining NVQs, therefore, is not that all countries implementing an NQF have followed the NVQ competence-based approach; although many have. Nor does it imply that the increasing prevalence of a 'written outcomes' approach to qualifications means that the NVQ approach to 'outcomes' is being followed.[10] It is rather that in providing a concrete example of what is involved in expressing qualifications as 'written outcomes', NVQs began a trend that has become an almost unquestioned element of all qualification reforms since.

Two preliminary comments about qualifications and outcomes are worth making at this point. First, *all* qualifications necessarily involve outcomes - in the sense that they represent a statement about what the holder knows and can do and always the *outcome* of some learning. Furthermore, in most societies, qualifications are used by students, trainees, employees, employers and admissions tutors (and, of course, education and training providers) both as a proxy for what someone knows and can do and as a 'currency' in the labour market; the more learning is expressed in qualifications, the more it can be 'bought' and 'sold'.

What made the NVQ model distinctive, at least in its time, was that it enabled the outcomes of qualifications to be detached from how they had been achieved; in other words it took the process of "commodification" of learning a

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[10] Although many, especially the poorer countries, have done so and seem likely to continue to do so.

step further. In looking back to the beginnings of this process and the links it may have had to other expressions of commodification, we may be able to learn something of the educational gains and losses involved.

Structure of the chapter

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows**.**

Section 2 poses the question "Why NVQs?" in more detail. Section 3 examines aspects of the political, social and economic origins of NVQs in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. It considers some of the justifications that were given for trying to replace the existing system of vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). In particular, it focuses on the Government's *Review of vocational qualifications* (RVQ) that led to NVQs.

Section 4 examines the pilot project undertaken in the Hotel and Catering Industry that became the basis for the initial design of NVQs. Section 5 explores in more detail the NVQ legacy of outcomes as 'written statements'. Section 6 discusses "functional analysis" - the methodology adopted for the design of NVQs - its assumptions, claims and limitations. Section 7 describes two examples of NVQ 'success stories'[11] - NVQs for Accounting Technicians and for Health and Care Workers in the National Health Service (NHS).[12] It examines the extent to which these 'successes' answer the criticisms of NVQs, and considers whether NVQs can be regarded, not as the basis for a national framework but, as some have claimed, as 'niche qualifications'. My analysis of the two cases suggests that the two examples are best seen as pointing to an alternative approach to the role of qualifications in educational reform. Section 8 concludes the chapter by returning to the question of the legacy of NVQs. It considers implications of the lessons that can be learned from NVQs for countries considering the introduction of outcomes-based qualification frameworks as a basis for educational reform - especially those with limited institutional provision for vocational education and training (VET).

2.   Why NVQs?

NVQs were the first attempt to develop a national vocational qualification system that was independent of any specific set of learning programmes or institutions that provided them. It is that 'independence' from the complexity of national education systems with their different providers, public and private, that makes an outcomes-based framework attractive to policy-makers, especially those working in international organizations. Secondly, and perhaps of even

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[11] My definition of success here is that in these two sectors, NVQs had widespread support among employees and employers and managers and that there is some evidence that they were associated with improvements in the quality of work and progression possibilities for those gaining them.

[12] Unwin and her colleagues (2004) site another interesting example of the 'success' of the NVQ competence approach in the automotive industry.

greater significance, is that the NVQ model with its levels and occupational standards expressed in terms of outcomes that are not tied to any specific learning programmes, has the same basic design structure that is found in all later NQFs. It is interesting to contrast the neutral way that the recent CEDEFOP[13] report, *The shift to outcomes* (CEDEFOP 2008) points out the impracticality of a qualifications framework based on inputs with the arguments for outcomes that were put forward in the United Kingdom in the 1980s (Raggatt and Williams 1999). As Raggatt and Williams point out, governments of the United Kingdom at the time were quite explicit that vocational qualifications defined in terms of 'outcomes' could be the basis for overcoming what they saw as the 'producer capture' of existing qualifications.[14]

It is also worth mentioning that the NVQ outcomes-based qualification model, even if not in the precise form it took in NVQs, was attractive to many governments which were seeking more control over public institutions. Why might this be so? A number of claims have been made on behalf of outcomes models. Four have a continuing importance and are worth mentioning:

1. they provide a basis for international comparability, transferability and ranking;

2. they offer a simple instrument, that can be expressed numerically, for governments to make the programmes and institutions which they have funded more accountable;

3. in showing that in principle it is possible to separate learning outcomes from the learning processes that lead to them, they became the basis for breaking the producer monopoly over qualifications and opened the way for qualifications to be branded by employers as other products 'on the market'; and

4. they provide the basis, at least in principle, for an approach to skills development that emphasizes the accreditation of existing skills rather than making any demands for the expansion of educational institutions.

NVQs were initially envisaged as qualifications that could be used to accredit and certify the skills acquired by young people on work experience programmes; the review on which they were based did not envisage them as leading to new college-based programmes. New programmes offered by both public and private colleges and funded by government did emerge because of the

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[13] European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.

[14] 'Producer capture' refers to the idea that public (and of course private, in a different way) institutions, like colleges, tend to focus more on the interests of their staff (and what they can teach) than on their role as providers of a public service that is responsive to employer and learner needs. The assumption by the Government of the United Kingdom when launching NVQs was that colleges should be giving more attention to employer needs - something they hoped would be achieved by qualifications such as NVQs in which the outcomes were defined by employer-led bodies. In practice, employers were not as interested in defining qualification outcomes as the Government had hoped, and qualifications became 'captured' as much by 'assessors' and consultants as by employers.

reluctance of many employers to provide work placements even when these were funded by the Government. Although governments of the time saw NVQs as a tool for employers to undertake skill-audits, it was only later that the potential of outcomes-based qualifications for accrediting the informal or prior experiential learning (APEL) of existing employees was recognized.[15]

Another significant factor in England was that the NVQ outcomes model, because it could certify any type of learning or skills at any level, was supported by some progressive educationalists (especially those involved in adult education and programmes for those with learning difficulties). The educational case for NVQs was that at least in theory the model was non-discriminatory and did not require access to institutions such as colleges and universities which had traditionally excluded those without qualifications based on formal education.

3. The origins of NVQs: From review to implementation

The original proposal for an NVQ framework was made by the *Review of Vocational Qualifications* (RVQ) which reported in 1986. The review was a response to two problems facing the Government at the time; one specific and one general. The specific problem was that a few years earlier the Government had launched the Youth Training Scheme (YTS, later extended as Youth Training - YT) - originally a one-year programme for unemployed school leavers facing a labour market in which apprenticeships were declining and jobs for those without qualifications fast disappearing. Both YTS and YT recruited many who left school without qualifications and who would previously have obtained unskilled work. However, it also recruited those who had gained school leaving qualifications and who in the past would have taken up craft or technician apprenticeships. The review was particularly concerned with how the learning acquired by the former group might be accredited.

The second and related factor which led to the review, was an awareness of the limitations of the existing system of vocational qualifications which had developed at a time when many jobs required few, if any, skills or knowledge. Not surprisingly, many occupational sectors had no qualifications, few existing qualifications had any links with each other and many vocational qualifications were only available at higher levels. This awareness was triggered off by several influential reports during the 1980s which contrasted the small proportion of the labour force in the United Kingdom who were qualified relative to the proportions in continental European countries such as France and Germany.

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[15] This potential was recognized early on by the designers of NVQs such as Graham Debling (see Raggatt and Unwin 1990), but their focus at the time was on skill audits rather than access. What was never recognized by those later endorsing APEL was that if work-based or other experiential learning was to be accredited on a significant scale, considerable investment to create an assessment infrastructure would be involved which might have been used with greater long-term benefits to expand the formal VET programmes on offer. I explore some of the contradictions involved in the claims made for APEL elsewhere (Young 2007, Ch. 13).

The RVQ was critical of the existing system. However, it was more balanced than the NVQ framework that it led to. It recognized that the existing system had strengths as well as the weaknesses. For example, it pointed to:

- the credibility and considerable expertise of the established Awarding Bodies such as the City and Guilds[16] which all the colleges offering programmes of vocational education used and many employers relied on; and

- the well-developed partnerships, at a local and regional level, between colleges and employers which often involved local government.[17]

These strengths of the existing system, especially the role of partnerships in underpinning the trust that employers placed in qualifications, have turned out to be more important than was realized at the time, at least by the Government and the designers of NVQs. However, the NVQ model that was introduced by the Government in 1987 did not take them into account - either in maintaining the continuity of the existing college-employer partnerships or in drawing on the existing experience of the Awarding Bodies in designing the new qualifications.

The almost evangelical enthusiasm for the new outcomes-based approach on the part of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), together with the pressures of a Government agenda which was more concerned with reducing the powers of trade unions than improving the skills of the workforce, meant that a balanced approach to reform was unlikely. Unwin et al (2004) summarized the Government's core priorities up to 2004 as:

- *promoting inclusion* - by encouraging more unqualified young people to enter training schemes which led to qualifications;

- *making colleges more accountable* - on the basis of a version of 'payment by results' which linked the funding of colleges and Awarding Bodies to numbers of NVQs awarded. This policy later had to be abandoned; and

- *putting an emphasis on basic skills* - which gave priority to the assessment of routine and low-level tasks and encouraged Awarding Bodies to focus on qualifications at the lowest levels.

My point here is not to criticize these priorities, which all address real problems. It is rather to indicate how, when associated with the outcomes model on which NVQs were based, they perpetuated a view of vocational qualifications as unlikely to be a basis for progression and as inherently inferior to those obtained at school or university. Furthermore, linking qualifications to low-level

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[16] Either out of conviction or for more instrumental reasons that went against all its traditions, City and Guilds slavishly followed the outcomes/competence model on which NVQs were based in the 1980s and 1990s and became typecast as the leading 'low level' provider. The issue of course is not that low-level vocational qualifications should not be available to those who have achieved little at school, but the nature of those qualifications and whether they offer a genuine basis for progression.

[17] These partnerships were not so different to the 'networks' that Strathdee (2005) in New Zealand suggests should be the basis of future innovation-led systems of vocational education and training (VET).

skills without providing those who obtain them with the resources to progress is likely to create another set of barriers and lead to new inequalities.

The case of NVQs is an important reminder that it is never only the design of qualifications that counts, important though that is. It is the priorities of governments (and other significant stakeholders such as employers) that shape both the design of qualifications and how they are used. Reforms are always led by broader policy priorities even when the language used assumes that qualifications are the driver.

In the 1980s, the priorities of governments of the United Kingdom were: (a) to achieve greater control over public expenditure by colleges and Awarding Bodies; and (b) to shift power over the provision of vocational education and training (VET) towards employers. NVQs, with their distinctive design feature of separating outcomes and assessment from learning programmes, appeared to be the ideal instrument to achieve these ends.

The proposals in the mid-1980s for a reformed work-based VET route[18] were based on what the Government at the time referred to as 'standards of a new kind'. Later these standards became known as 'occupational standards' and were similar to the New Zealand and South African examples of 'unit standards'. It was assumed that these 'new standards' - expressed as 'written outcomes' - would address what were seen to be the main weaknesses of traditional vocational qualifications. These were the time-serving basis of traditional apprenticeships and their dependence on the 'subjective' judgements of a master craftsmen and technicians. It was also assumed that these 'new standards' would provide a rigorous and more employment-relevant alternative to the 'knowledge-based' approach to standards associated with written examinations.

However the development of these 'standards of a new kind' relied on two questionable assumptions. The first was that employers would have the time, commitment and expertise to assess trainees. The second was that 'standard tasks' could be used as a reliable basis for judging workplace performance. Government policy-makers hoped that because employers now 'owned' these new standards (because they had been developed by employer-led bodies), it would be in their interests to take responsibility for using them for assessing their employees. However, many employers resisted taking on these responsibilities as too time-consuming and bureaucratic[19]. As a consequence, these assessment tasks were again taken over by Awarding Bodies who, funded by government, developed a complex hierarchy of assessors, and internal and external verifiers in an attempt to guarantee quality.

This strategy was the logical outcome of basing assessment on standardized tasks. However, although these 'tasks' were designed to replace the trust on which the old qualifications were based and that was assumed to be defective,

[18] Youth Training (YT), the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) and later, a national apprenticeship structure.

[19] Assessment had previously been the responsibility of partnerships between employers, colleges and Awarding Bodies.

they did not create a basis of trust in the new qualifications. The standardized tasks replaced judgements with procedures (has the candidate undertaken the task in the specified way?). This shift is not unique to NVQs but part of a broader trend in approaches to quality and standards that can be described as 'generic'. Instead of confidence being placed in the judgements of specialists- for example, master craftspersons or professionals - it is placed in those who are experts in procedures for interpreting outcomes that apply to all occupations and sectors. Doubts about such a 'generic' model of quality may account for why some employers and professional bodies (as in the example of Accountancy discussed in Section 7 of this chapter), continue to insist on written examinations or still use traditional types of qualifications.

4.   CATERBASE: The pilot project on which NVQs were based[20]

Even such a radical innovation as NVQs was not developed in a vacuum. As Susan James reports (James 2006), the key features of NVQs can be traced back to a pilot project funded by the government in the mid 1980s and launched by CATERBASE, the Hospitality and Catering Employers Training Organization. The Project was initially designed to develop a framework for assessing workplace learning in the Hotel and Catering sector which would replace the combination of 'master craftsman judgement' and 'time serving' associated with traditional apprenticeships. The new scheme was based on agreed standards of skill (the 'standards of a new kind' referred to earlier) related to the jobs available in the sector.[21]

The CATERBASE scheme of assessment was based on a functional analysis[22] of work tasks which led to occupational activities being broken up into tasks of increasing levels of detail[23]. This approach was in stark contrast to the traditional assessment of work-based learning in apprenticeships which was based on the idea that learning is *a process* in which knowledge and skills and the broader set of attitudes and values associated with becoming a member of an occupation are acquired and developed by trainees and apprentices *over time*. It followed that the final assessment of an apprentice was not just an assessment of outcomes but the culmination of a process of learning and continuous assessment

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[20] This section draws substantially on Susan James's 2006 paper.

[21] James notes a point that has recurred in successive attempts to reform vocational qualifications in England in sectors with no significant tradition of employer involvement in qualification design and where in many cases vocational qualifications had not been developed. While the majority of jobs in a sector like Hotel and Catering were with small employers, this type of employment was hardly represented on the CATERBASE Project or in the groups involved in developing the standards; these groups were led, understandably, by large employers such as the hotel chains.

[22] See later section for a discussion of this methodology.

[23] A feature of NVQs was sharply criticized later by Alison Wolf (1995).

during the period of apprenticeship. Process and outcome in traditional apprenticeships were interdependent.

Responses from employers taking part in the initial evaluation of the CATERBASE Project were mixed, according to James. Many liked its emphasis on workplace skills but complained that trainees acquired too little 'theory'. Some compared the scheme unfavourably with the previous college-based programme. They stressed the importance of knowing which employers the trainees had been placed with as a basis for judging their competence. In other words, for these employers, assessment of outcomes *on their own* was not enough.

Nevertheless the programme was seen by the Government as a 'success' and was extended to other sectors including:

- clothing manufacture,

- retail distribution,

- business administration,

- pensions management, and

- marine engineering.

Despite the reservations expressed by the employers, the lists of standard tasks or outcomes developed by the CATERBASE Project was the model adopted for NVQs.

Susan James (2006) goes on to point to the wider lessons from the Project that were largely neglected in the design of NVQs. As she says:

> … the emphasis on outcomes, and the underlying notion of competence collide with the training practices and needs of employers. The identification of a worker as either competent or not (yet) competent (the basis on which an NVQ is awarded or withheld), does not do justice to the depth and breadth of knowledge and skill that is constructed in the workplace. …. Qualifications are not skills themselves *but a proxy for skill*[24] and it is debatable as to the skills that are being qualified in an NVQ.

This obvious, but easily forgotten, point about the proxy character of qualifications is often missed in the unqualified support given to what CEDEFOP refer to as the 'shift to outcomes'. Judgement of and trust in a qualification always depends on factors that are not expressed in the written outcomes and cannot be 'written down'. Similar problems are avoided rather than faced when governments use qualification outcomes to drive the reform of vocational education and training and forget that they are relying on 'proxies' for a far more complex institutional process.

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[24] My underlining/bold.

5. NVQs and the legacy of outcomes as 'written statements'

It was suggested in the introductory section of this chapter that NVQs were certainly the first and probably the most influential example of an attempt to introduce, on a national basis, an outcomes-based model for the reform of vocational education and training (VET). NVQs provided the first example of the potential of 'written outcomes' as a way of describing qualifications that has been picked up in many recent proposals for NQFs, including the recently-introduced English Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) and the European Union's European Qualifications Framework (EQF). As we are told by the recent CEDEFOP Report (CEDEFOP 2008), this 'shift to outcomes' that was initiated with NVQs, is now an almost unchallenged global development in how qualifications are thought about, written about and designed.[25] In relation to the legacy of NVQs and the lessons that might be learned from the problems that the NVQ outcomes-model gave rise to, the question is the significance of the shift referred to by CEDEFOP.

Let me begin with a statement from Gilbert Jessup (Deputy Chief Executive of NCVQ) quoted by Susan James (2006):

> … the shift to an outcomes-led system of Education and Training *thus means a qualification-led or assessment-led system*… As candidates do not have to undergo any particular programme of learning, the *award of an NVQ is based solely on the outcome of assessment.* (Jessup 1991)

Jessup is very clear that the NVQ outcomes framework was an 'assessment-led system' that did not rely on the learner undergoing "any particular programme of learning". This might be seen as an extreme view which has been modified since in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, although evidence from some of the Project's case studies suggests this is not so. A less extreme version of the NVQ model might be referred to as outcomes-based rather than outcomes-led, and it is this that appears to be the legacy of NVQs that is suggested by the recent CEDEFOP report (CEDEFOP 2008).

Distinguishing between qualifications *based-on* learning outcomes and qualifications *led-by* learning outcomes raises two rather different issues in light of the NVQ experience. Firstly, if an NQF, like the NVQ framework, is designed to accredit informal or experiential learning, the distinction between a qualification being outcomes-led and outcomes-based does not apply. The accreditation of experiential learning must be **led by** the 'written outcomes'; without any learning programme to draw on, outcomes are all that assessors have

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[25] This 'evolutionary' view of the spread of outcomes-based approaches portrayed by CEDEFOP can certainly be challenged (Young and Allais 2009). Furthermore, what outcomes mean and how they are (or are not) related to the processes that lead to them remain highly-contentious issues (Brockman, Clark and Winch 2008).

to rely on[26] in making their judgements about a learner's experience. Learners are expected to use the written outcomes to reflect on and reorganize their experience.

Whether or not the accreditation of experiential learning (APEL) relies on outcomes depends on its purpose. Two purposes for APEL can be distinguished; it can be designed to promote access to formal education and hence qualifications; or it can be designed to replace formal education and provide access directly to qualifications. The former is more like a pedagogic strategy for those who have been denied formal education, rather than a form of assessment. In such a case, outcomes will only be involved in the sense that the goals (outcomes) of APEL are the successful progression of learners to a programme which would normally require formal qualifications for entry. In the case of APEL leading to qualifications, the question remains whether any value is added to the experiential learning in the process of accreditation.[27]

The second and more fundamental issue arises from the assumption, inherited from NVQs, that learning outcomes '... can be stated in written form". The CEDEFOP report (2008) defines learning outcomes as:

> … statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completion of learning.

Although it is not explicitly in the CEDEFOP definition, an outcome that can be stated must also be able to be written; writing an outcome down is only another form of statement. The claim that qualifications can be adequately described by the 'written explicitness' of the learning outcomes was the distinguishing feature of NVQs and is also a feature of other outcomes-based qualifications and qualification frameworks.

However, it was disagreements over 'written explicitness', and it might be argued, its inherent impossibility, that gave rise to the difficulties over jargon and conflicts over 'correct wording' in the standard setting process for NVQs in the United Kingdom and for unit standards in New Zealand and South Africa. Precise wording, such as use of active verbs, was the only resource that officials working for SAQA in South Africa and NCVQ (and later QCA) in England had to call on in the standard setting process.

In the case of NVQs in the United Kingdom, and in response to the many complaints by employers and others about jargon, the Government set up a Review of NVQs (the Beaumont Review), and as a result, the criteria for defining outcomes were substantially relaxed. One consequence was an inevitable (and one might say, realistic) degree of arbitrariness in how outcomes

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[26] Learners cannot (or should not need to) study for such a qualification; they already have the 'experience'. It is, of course, possible for programmes to be established to help learners use outcomes to reflect on their experience.

[27] Irena Grugulis (2003) points out in her research on management NVQs that the activity managers have to engage in to 'reorganize' their experience for it to be accredited bears little relationship to the skills and knowledge required for management.

were interpreted and an implicit recognition that there was no escaping professional or other specialist judgement.

6.   A new methodology? Functional analysis and its critics

Claims for the rigour and quality of the qualifications that NVQs were designed to replace were made on the basis of specialist knowledge associated with different sectors and occupations. NVQs replaced this 'occupational specialization' approach by a generic method that was applied to all occupations and sectors known as "functional analysis". This section examines this approach in more detail.

Functional analysis[28] and the closely-associated ideas of outcomes, competence and 'standards of a new kind' originated in occupational psychology in the USA in the 1960s and the earlier ideas of scientific management (Callaghan 1964). However, in the late 1980s, it represented, at least for the United Kingdom, a quite new approach to the design of vocational qualifications.[29] It made and was intended to make a clean break with the two main elements of qualification design prior to the 1980s. These were:

- the importance of specifying the amount of time that an apprentice would need (sometimes as long as seven years) to become qualified; governments in the 1980s saw this 'time serving' approach as leaving too much control to the trade unions; and

- the *syllabus as the basis* for teaching programmes and the assessment of off-the-job learning; governments opposed this as leaving too much control to the teachers, the colleges and the Awarding Bodies.

Both these features of traditional qualification design were seen by proponents[30] of functional analysis as out of date and backward looking. One way of looking at functional analysis is as an example of what might be described as 'conservative modernization'. It was 'modernizing' in its claims to being based on an objective, neutral and 'scientific' theory of job performance; it was 'conservative' in being the basis for transferring power over qualifications from teachers, colleges and trade unions to employers.

Functional analysis begins with the assumption that a statement of competent workplace performance can be identified by researchers in ways

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[28] The most elaborate account of functional analysis is given by Mansfield and Mitchell (1995).

[29] For some, the approach was seen as applicable to all qualifications, vocational and general (or academic) (Jessup 1991).

[30] The proponents were largely located in the Manpower Services Commission and the Standards and Methodology Branch of the Employment Department (and later in NCVQ and a range of private consultancies such as PRIME) which controlled government expenditure on vocational education and training.

which are recognized by appropriate employers. It derives from such statements a set of individual *elements of competence* and their associated performance criteria. These *elements of competence* (they later became known as occupational standards) are then grouped together into *units of competence* which are assumed to make sense to, and be valued by, employers and hence warrant separate accreditation. Each NVQ was made up of a number of related 'units of competence'.

However, 'performances' are often not easily observed, or clearly distinguishable from the context in which they take place. It follows that there may be situations in which assessment which concentrates on knowledge and understanding provides <u>better grounds</u> for inferring competence than a number of observed performances (see the example of Accounting Technicians later in this chapter). Furthermore, and contrary to the claims made for NVQs by Jessup (1991), and referred to earlier, that particular learning processes are not relevant to the assessment of competence, it can be argued that in relation to many types of workplace performance, knowledge of the learning process which leads to an outcome is an essential element in making the inference necessary if competence is to be attributed to an observed performance. An example might be the negotiating skills involved in human resources development or personnel management, where knowledge of the learning processes in which candidates have been involved may be crucial to interpreting their performance. It seems likely that the explicit separation of learning processes from learning outcomes in NVQs may account for their substantially higher take-up at lower levels where work tasks involve less judgement and less ambiguity.

Functional analysis is a technique that involves:

- identifying or defining the key purpose (or functions) of an occupation;

- subdividing the key purpose of an occupation in order to establish the outcomes which must be met for the key purpose to be achieved; and

- re-aggregating or clustering different groups of outcomes to form vocational qualifications.

Assessment of workplace performance, therefore, is the key to competence and gaining an NVQ. Functional analysis is a technique which sets out to be an objective, and systematic method for analyzing the tasks which are required for competent performance.

To summarize; functional analysis claims to be a way of identifying the purposes of employee or trainee activities and breaking them down until they are described in sufficient detail to be used as 'standards'. It aims to replace

judgements of competence with *rules for inferring competence*[31] from individual performances.[32]

Statements of what constitutes desired or required performance which are 'derived' from functional analysis, are however, no more than statements of those who claim the right to prescribe performance, and to make appropriate inferences on the basis of observing performance; they are usually employers. Functional analysis is therefore perhaps best seen as an extension of 'scientific management' thinking to the design of qualifications. It also draws heavily on industrial approaches to product standards which have played such an important role in every branch of industry. It relies on the assumption that human performance can be measured with the same lack of ambiguity as the diameter of a screw or the resistance of a length of wire.

Like other such methods, functional analysis claims to be 'scientific' and 'neutral' and to reject and replace the judgements of specialists, whether technical, craft or professional. In practice, it is no more 'objective' in any absolute sense than the methods it replaces; the rules of functional analysis are arbitrary; they are not based on any 'theory, and judgements are still involved in interpreting the rules developed by the analysis. In effect, it replaces one set of judgements - those based on the specialist knowledge of different occupational and sectoral communities - by judgements made by trained assessors and verifiers. One way of describing the change would be between two kinds of trust. Trust in the qualifications being replaced by NVQs relied on specialist knowledge of craftsmen, technicians and members of professions. Trust in NVQs is based on the precision of the definitions of outcomes. In practice, outcomes always involve interpretation in particular cases; greater precision and over-specification leads inevitably to trivialization of outcomes. Trust in 'experts' is thus replaced by trust in following the correct procedures. Despite and in part because of its technical and somewhat obscure language, and in part because in reality it is constituted by ad hoc judgements, functional analysis easily becomes a modern and unquestioned 'common sense' that can be invoked to claim that the new qualifications are relevant and useful.

This account of the method adopted for the design and assessment of NVQs does not claim that it is always copied where written outcomes are used in defining qualifications; it may not be. What I have set out to demonstrate in my account of functional analysis is that any claim that 'written outcomes', first expressed in NVQs, are based on a scientific and objective methodology is false; this claim has no basis. Furthermore, it is a methodology which in the United Kingdom, led to qualifications that had to be successively revised, never achieved high take-up and offered few progression opportunities for those achieving them. It seems likely that wherever a similar approach is used it will

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[31] Competence in this sense refers to having a reliable basis for predicting that someone will be able do something again according to specific criteria that they have been observed doing.

[32] 'Performance' in this sense is what a person does when completing a specific task. A performance is judged 'competent' if according to the assessor, it accords with specific criteria of competence.

underemphasize factors such as 'learning time' and 'understanding' that are likely to be crucial if qualifications are to promote genuine skill development and knowledge acquisition. The next section, which discusses two NVQ "success stories", is one way of giving substance to this point.

7.   NVQ "success" stories

Approximately 12 per cent of the workforce in the United Kingdom now have NVQs. However, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of NVQs that are obtained via government-funded schemes which make them a requirement. Successive attempts have been made to reform NVQs in response both to the criticisms of researchers and the complaints of employers. Responses to both admit the untenability of the original claims and attempt to achieve a compromise. Responses to employer complaints, discussed briefly in an earlier section, have focused on making NVQs simpler, less jargonized and easier to assess; in effect this involves weakening the claims that their assessment is 'objectively' based and as a consequence, if not explicitly, assessment has to rely on personal judgements, which will sometimes, but not always, be based on reliable occupational (or professional) knowledge.

The dominant critique of researchers has focused on how the outcomes-led approach neglects or plays down the importance of the knowledge that underpins all but the most routine work. Successive attempts have been made to overcome this weakness - most recently by introducing Technical Certificates as an off-the-job complement to NVQs which would require evidence of knowledge assessed independently of workplace performance. However, the requirement that this 'underpinning knowledge and understanding', as it is referred to, must be shown to 'underpin performance' means that it is invariably expressed as lists of topics with no pedagogic or curricular coherence (Young 2007: Barnett 2006). In other words, it tends to be 'knowledge as facts' rather than 'knowledge as understanding' that is emphasized. It is not surprising that employers and trainees continue to prefer other types of qualifications.

However, there have been 'success stories' which have led the Government to modify its original aims for NVQs as being the basis for a single NQF and to accept that they may be better seen as 'useful niche qualifications' (James 2006).[33] This is, of course, an admission of defeat for the original claims that the NVQ outcomes-based framework could include all vocational qualifications.

Instead of analyzing the two examples of 'successes' from the point of view of what they say about the NVQ model, I want to consider them from the perspective of the specific sectors or occupations involved. In this way, I

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[33] Whether the Government will be able to claim that the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) will fulfil the original hopes for NVQs as a national framework is difficult to say. The QCF is still at an early stage of development and implementation. It has clearly been influenced by a contemporary belief that accrediting learning, however small the individual 'bits' that are accredited, will promote continuous lifelong learning. Launching the QCF no doubt also reflects the pressure on all European Union countries to align their qualifications with the EQF.

consider these NVQ 'successes' not primarily as 'niche qualifications' but as examples of occupations using and modifying the NVQ framework for their specific needs. Secondly I will argue that the two examples, in rather different but complementary ways, indicate an alternative and, in my view, better way of thinking about the role for qualifications in promoting the acquisition of skills and knowledge.

7.1 Accounting Technician NVQs[34]

Accounting Technicians assist Chartered and other senior Accountants in the United Kingdom and other countries. The leading Awarding Body for Accounting Technician NVQs is the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT). AAT NVQs are distinctive in a number of ways:

a. they are sponsored by four out of five of the professional associations of Accountants;

b. they provide a route to becoming a Chartered or other senior Accountant for those who have not followed the traditional graduate route (30 per cent of those taking AAT NVQs go on to study at senior level);

c. part of the assessment for the NVQ is by formal written examinations; these are insisted on by employers; and

d. AAT NVQs do not rely solely or even primarily on work-based assessment or work experience.

All these features set NVQs in Accounting apart from most other NVQs. The differences reflect:

a. the key role played by the professional associations in both the design and assessment of AAT NVQs;

b. the distinctive nature of the workplaces where Accountancy Technicians are employed and the work roles they undertake;

c. the recognition by the designers of AAT NVQs that:

   o technician-level roles in financial services do not always provide the necessary experience or opportunities for gathering workplace evidence that NVQs normally require, even with the best-willed employers;

   o employers are understandably unwilling to allow confidential information on clients to go into 'portfolios of evidence', even if anonymized;

   o few employers are prepared to provide the necessary off-the-job training that would lead to AAT NVQs. As a result, most training for Accountancy Technicians takes place in classrooms or in simulations; and

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[34] I am most grateful for Clare Morley's (Director of Education and Training, Association of Accounting Technicians) help in writing this section. My account draws on a brief email and later conversation with her. However, she is in no way responsible for how I have interpreted what she wrote, or her comments on my initial draft.

- outcomes (or occupational standards) for AAT NVQs are defined as broad guidelines that are not expected to be the basis for deriving curricula or examinations.

AAT NVQs are an example of a qualification which was derived from the needs of an occupation as a whole and where the profession itself took a leading role in the design. Instead of 'fitting in' to the NVQ framework, the Accountancy profession modified the NVQ framework to fit their needs.

Outcomes, to repeat an earlier point, in the broadest sense, are a feature of any qualification; those deciding to study to be Accounting Technicians want to know that the NVQ will qualify them to be Accounting Technicians. Qualifications provide guides to programme developers and when expressed in terms of levels, link programmes to progression pathways and assist users in comparing different qualifications. The distinctive feature of the AAT case is not that they dispensed with outcomes; that would be like a school dispensing with educational aims or a political party not having political goals. It was that the AAT recognized that they had to make the framework fit their goals; not vice versa. It is a completely different approach to one which begins with the framework and assumes that the necessary skills to be developed and knowledge to be acquired can be derived from it.

Also, by agreeing to their qualifications being part of the NVQ framework, the AAT were able to ensure that programmes for Accounting trainees were eligible for government grants and were linked to the wider framework of vocational qualifications - making it easier for trainees to move to a different occupation. On the other hand, representatives of the Accountancy profession negotiated their own interpretation of NVQ outcomes to ensure that assessment was closely embedded in systematic off-the-job programmes; this for them required assessment to be by written examination. As a consequence, Accounting NVQs are very different from most NVQs which comply closely with the outcomes-based format. Furthermore, they offer a real basis for progression and are widely respected within and beyond the profession in the many different sectors where Accountancy Technicians are employed.

The main lesson to be learned from the example of Accounting Technicians is the crucial role of a Professional Body in the development of lower-level vocational qualifications. Where a profession is in a powerful position in relation to employers and the Qualifications Authority (in this case the QCA) and has both a material and moral interest in the capabilities and progression possibilities of its junior and less-qualified members, it is able to shape the framework to suite its needs rather than having to adapt and be driven by it.

The Accounting NVQs example raises a number of questions. Firstly, why did they take the form they did in the specific case of AAT NVQs? Secondly, what does the AAT example say about the NVQ outcomes model? Thirdly, what does the Accounting Technician example say about NVQs in occupational fields where there is no powerful or dominant profession or no profession that has an interest and feels a responsibility for the prospects and capabilities of lower-level members of the occupation? And fourthly, do the AAT NVQs go against the claims of portability and transferability made for NVQs (and NQFs)?

My comments on these questions are inevitably speculative:

1. As always where career opportunities are at stake, there is a question of power, its legitimacy and how it is used. Chartered and other senior Accountants are a powerful profession in the United Kingdom with high prestige and a key and growing role in both private and public sectors. It seems likely that the QCA, until recently the Regulatory Body responsible for the quality assurance of NVQs, felt they had more to gain by agreeing to modify their assessment rules for the AAT NVQ, given the prestige that a qualification in Accounting would give to the whole NVQ framework.

2. In many ways Accounting is a good example of a demand-led rather than a supply-led approach to qualifications. In this case, the demand came from the profession and their employers; not the QCA. It also represents an input-led rather than an outcomes-led approach to design. The skills and knowledge that are needed both to undertake the job of Accounting Technician and to be the basis for progression to becoming a Chartered Accountant, not the outcomes, were the basis for the decisions about curricula and assessment methods made by the profession. The outcomes of the NVQ framework took their place as guides to those developing the programmes. In that way the profession and the AAT were operating more like universities; they had the power and prestige to force the NCVQ to allow them to modify the framework outcomes to suit their purposes; they were not required to treat the NVQ framework as a set of rules that they had to comply with.

3. The example of the approach of a strong profession-led occupation such as Accounting Technicians suggests that it is the human resources development (HRD) strategies of the profession and their employers which determine the extent to which their less-qualified members are able to progress and develop their skills and knowledge; qualifications themselves can play a more or less supportive role in this process. In the case of sectors in which HRD strategies are limited to higher-level employees, (as often tends to be the case); or sometimes in the case of small employers, they hardly exist; an outcomes-based approach to qualifications of the NVQ type appears to have little to offer. While collaboration with professions is doubtless what NQF designers claim they want, making it a reality is very different. It involves, as in the case of Accounting, a totally different developmental model than that adopted for most NVQs and a totally different role for qualifications. Again, this is a point I return to in the final section.

4. I have argued that in this case, the professional bodies played a crucial role in developing the vocational qualification in Accounting. Without them, there is no reason to suppose that Accounting NVQs would be significantly different from many others. This raises a serious question about the role of an NVQ outcomes-based framework in the absence of such a body. I will return to this point in the concluding section of this chapter.

5. On the issues of portability and transferability which are much emphasized in proposals for outcomes-based NQFs, the Accounting NVQ example suggests that these processes depend more on the status and prestige of the occupation and its associated qualifications within the sector and more broadly than on the design of the qualifications itself. It seems likely that the high status of the Accountancy profession will be important in making Accounting Technicians and Accounting NVQs recognized in related occupations in the financial sector and beyond. The broader lesson from the Accounting example is that unless

qualifications - and by implication, NQFs, are rooted in the everyday work of the occupation concerned, they are likely to lead only to credential inflation and not to the opportunities for progression that are claimed for them.

From the point of view of lessons for developing countries, it is interesting that the professional associations of Chartered Accountants have played a similarly proactive role in South Africa. Not only is the AAT the Awarding Body for Accounting Technicians in South Africa, but it has supported a successful programme of professional development for municipal Accountants. A further positive outcome is that there has been a remarkable take up of certificates and diplomas in Accounting awarded, and the Accounting SETA (Sector Educational and Training Authority) is widely recognized as a national leader.[35]

7.2 Health Care[36]

In her SKOPE Paper (Cox 2007), Anne Cox begins by asking why, despite the many criticisms made of NVQs, there is a wide consensus that they have been a useful qualification for employers and employees in the National Health Service (NHS). She takes up the distinction proposed by Fuller and Unwin (2004) between 'restricted' and 'expansive' working environments and suggests that, for the low- and lower-level employees who she studied, the NHS represents a number of features of an 'expansive working environment'; this Unwin and Fuller define in terms of the extent:

- of learning and career opportunities;
- of emotional and practical support for learners;
- to which jobs are appropriately designed; and
- to which individual and organizational objectives are aligned.

Cox argues that the NHS's approach to HRD appeared to have benefits for both managers and staff and that it is in this context that NVQs have been seen as a useful resource by both groups.

For managers, Cox lists as the main benefits of the policy: reduced skills shortages, easier recruitment, and more functional flexibility of staff. For staff, the same policy offered:

- opportunities for knowledge and skill acquisition that lead to new jobs; and
- enhanced responsibility and access to promotion opportunities linked to appropriate training programmes.

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[35] It is also worth noting that the presence of a growing body of employees in both public and private sectors with qualifications in Accounting is likely to be an important condition for minimizing public sector corruption.

[36] This example is based on the SKOPE (Skills, Knowledge and Organizational Performance Project) (University of Cardiff) Working Paper by Anne Cox (2007).

Her interviews with management and staff at a number of work sites indicated that both recognized the currency of NVQs as passports to accessing professional training for progression to nursing and midwifery. Furthermore, managers were rigorous in:

- policing the quality of tuition;

- ensuring that programmes leading to NVQs had access to specialist knowledge and new skills; and

- establishing the 'communities of trust' between hospitals, colleges and local universities that were needed to build the credibility of the programmes and the qualifications linked to them.

In contrast to the Accounting example, where the key role is played by the professional associations, the NHS case is of a large public sector employer with a senior management who have adopted a strong policy on HRD.

Government was in a position to insist that the NHS, as a public sector employer reliant on Government funds, adopted NVQs. However, it was the NHS's HRD policy that enabled them to integrate the NVQs into the organization of the work and to use them to provide opportunities for progression for staff. This is not a case, as with the Accounting example, of the employers insisting on modifying the NVQ outcomes model, but of integrating the NVQ into the way the work was organized.

In many ways, as the largest employer in the country, the NHS is unique, and the issues of portability and transferability are internal rather than external. On the other hand, the lesson of occupational pressures for improvement of a working environment driving the use of qualifications is similar to the Accounting case. Once the NHS adopted an HRD policy which emphasized staff progression across traditional occupational divides (such as nursing assistant to midwife), it was the additional learning opportunities such as access to specialist training in nursing and midwifery, and opportunities to acquire new skills such as blood testing, and the use of ECGs, that helped build the credibility of the NVQs; not its specific outcomes.

The issue that the Health Care example raises is similar to that raised by the case of Accounting. In each case, the credibility and 'success' of the NVQs depended on well-resourced workplaces and employers with a relatively long term view of HRD.

In the large number of workplaces where such conditions do not apply or where the vast majority of the jobs make few skill demands, it is difficult to see what the outcomes-based model like NVQs can offer.

8.   Some lessons from the NVQ experience

Despite considerable investment and many changes over a period of over 20 years, researchers and commentators such as the SKOPE Team at Cardiff and Oxford Universities do not see the introduction of NVQ's as having led to substantial improvements in skill development or in the work-based training system in the United Kingdom (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to be more precise). NVQs have not been taken up with any enthusiasm by large numbers of employers for whom it was claimed they were specifically designed.

In a society such as England where those taking vocational qualifications are all too easily seen as failures from academic programmes, many employers continue to recruit largely on the basis of academic qualifications. This is partly their prejudice and the long history of social class divisions in English education. However, it also reflects the weak knowledge base of NVQs which was explicitly designed to emphasize performance rather than knowledge or understanding on the largely unspoken assumption that understanding was beyond the capabilities of those likely to take such qualifications.

This brief review of the legacy of NVQs leaves a puzzle. Despite their low take-up in the United Kingdom, the lack of evidence that they have led to significant improvements in skill development, and a wide range of substantial criticisms, NVQs have continued to provide a model across the world for competence-based approaches to training and NQFs based on outcomes. Why might this be so?

We must conclude that the continued popularity of the NVQ model has to be understood in terms of the superficial plausibility of its appeal to governments who are more interested in finding ways of controlling public expenditure than addressing the complex problems concerned with the role of skills and knowledge in economic development. Furthermore, NVQ-type models are likely to be attractive to governments of developing countries because they are often supported by international agencies and other aid donors.

On the other hand, as the two examples of the Accounting Technicians and Health Care occupations in the NHS indicate, NVQs have had their 'successes'. In each case (these are by no means the only ones, but I suspect others would tell a similar story), it was the HRD policy of the sector and organization involved that underpinned the credibility, for employees and employers, of the particular NVQs. In the case of Accounting Technicians, the leadership role was undertaken by the major professional bodies; in the case of Health Care NVQs, it was taken by the senior management of the NHS as the main public sector employer. These two examples of 'successes' raise serious questions about generalizing the outcomes model, of which NVQs were an early if not the first example. This is especially the case in countries with undeveloped institutional provision for VET and an absence of effective professional bodies and established employer-college training partnerships.

The 'successful' examples suggest that qualifications, and specifically qualification design involving the specification of outcomes, are unlikely to be the major factors in promoting skill development. The AAT and the NHS used NVQs to suit their needs. In the Accounting case, this involved changing many of the rules of the NVQ framework, and in the case of Health Care, it involved building in additional learning resources which made employees see the whole professional development programme (including the NVQs) as worthwhile and helped the NVQs gain credibility with senior staff, as well as with those who achieved them.

The examples of NVQ 'successes' point not primarily to the need to redesign qualifications or to establish an NQF (although a case can be made for both), but to the need for a much broader approach to vocational education reform as part of an overall HRD strategy. This would begin with an innovative approach to stimulating product and service development and an active response to the knowledge and skill needs that this would give rise to. Such an approach will inevitably encourage the development of partnerships between employers,

colleges and universities. If these partnerships are to provide progression routes for employees, they will need a qualification framework which provides the 'proxies' for the skills and knowledge needed and the maps of the appropriate and possible sequences and pathways through which they can be achieved.

This is not to underemphasize the role of a qualification framework, but to locate it in its specific purposes - *in what it can do*, *not in what policy-makers want it to do.* Starting with a framework of outcomes and levels and then trying to make them 'proxies' for skills is to invert the way that the most successful qualification systems have been developed. The NVQ experience suggests that starting with the framework of written outcomes cannot fulfil the claims made for it, except in exceptional circumstances of the kind that the two 'successes' illustrate.

A broader-based approach to skill development and knowledge acquisition for economic growth has to go back to where vocational qualifications started in the nineteenth century and interpret those strategies in twenty-first century terms. The first vocational qualifications which NVQs attempted to replace had three features of continuing relevance today:

1. they were *demand-led by employers* at a time industrialization was beginning to incorporate the new discoveries in the natural sciences;

2. their development was closely linked to *the development of educational institutions* in close *partnership with local employers*; and

3. *leading members of the professions and universities* where the new knowledge was being produced *were closely involved* in the design and assessment of the new vocational qualifications.

None of these conditions apply to NVQs as a framework of 'written outcomes' and none of them suggest that an outcomes-led framework has the role often claimed for it. However, the three conditions were involved, albeit in different ways, in two 'successes' described. The problem with NVQs was that they tried to break with the past rather than learn from and build on the past. That is the lesson we must learn from their legacy.

Acknowledgements

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Chapter 2: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework:
A case study of a very 'early starter'
- David Raffe

1.   Introduction and overview

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was formally launched in 2001. It is a comprehensive credit-based framework with 12 levels, intended to accommodate all qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland. It aims to support access to learning and to make the education and training system more transparent. It aspires to become the 'national language' of learning in Scotland. It is a voluntary framework, led by a partnership which initially comprised two higher education bodies: the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA: the main awarding body for school and college qualifications), the Scottish Government and two higher education bodies, and later included the colleges (multi-purpose institutions which, along with the universities, are responsible for most public, institution-based, vocational and general post-school education). Qualifications in the framework must be credit-rated, which means that each unit must be described in terms of a volume of learning (credit) at a given level of the framework. This in turn requires that units and qualifications are expressed in terms of learning outcomes, but the framework does not impose a narrow concept of outcome or competence. The SCQF has a 'loose' design, although it embraces sub-frameworks which are more tightly specified.

These features differ from many other NQFs. Researchers have contrasted 'enabling' or 'communications' frameworks, which are voluntary, loosely specified, modest in ambition and implemented through bottom-up procedures, with 'regulatory' or 'transformational' frameworks which are compulsory, tightly specified and led by governments or central agencies with the aim of reforming or transforming education and training (e.g. Young 2005, Allais 2007). Different analysts have used different terms and criteria to present this contrast. Figure 1 below lists features of different types of NQF which broadly correspond to other researchers' typologies. It compares two ideal types, a communications framework and a transformational framework; but it also suggests that these two types define the poles of a continuum and that many NQFs fall between these poles and more closely resemble what Figure 1 calls a "reforming framework". The SCQF, by contrast, appears as a relatively extreme case, and lies at the communications end of the continuum.

This view in turn is associated with what I shall call the celebratory account of the Scottish framework. The SCQF is widely perceived as a relatively successful framework. It is at an advanced stage of implementation, at least as measured by the proportion of learning that it covers; it is associated with positive developments in access, progression and transfer; it has contributed to a more transparent, flexible system; and, above all, it has retained the support of all sectors of education and training. These achievements have enabled the SCQF to assume an almost moral authority among NQFs and to become a source of lessons to others. And these lessons attribute the SCQF's relative success to its nature as a communications framework. Thus, the SCQF experience is perceived to show that an NQF should not expect to achieve major change in education and training, except as part of a broader suite of policies; that a comprehensive

framework needs a loose design; that the engagement and ownership of stakeholders, and especially of education and training providers and awarding bodies, is necessary for success; and that the implementation and impact of an NQF take time.

Figure 1.   A typology of NQFs

Type of NQF	Communications	Reforming	Transformational
Starting point	**Existing ET system**	**Existing ET system**	**Future ET system**
Purpose	▪ To increase transparency; ▪ To provide tool for rationalizing system, increasing coherence, facilitating access transfer and progression	▪ To achieve specific reforms, e.g. fill gaps, enhance quality, extend access transfer and progression; ▪ To provide tool for rationalizing system, increasing coherence	▪ To transform ET and lead development of new system
Design	▪ Loose, varies across sub-frameworks	▪ Tighter, but varies across sub-frameworks	▪ Tight, central specification imposed more uniformly
Leadership and control	▪ Voluntary ▪ 'Bottom up' ▪ ET institutions share leadership ▪ Substantial decision-making at level of sub-framework	▪ Compulsory ▪ 'Top-down': led by central agency/govt. ▪ ET institutions as key partners Control may vary across sub-frameworks	▪ Compulsory ▪ 'Top down': led by central agency/govt. ▪ ET institutions among partners ▪ Centralized control
Expected role in change	▪ Tool for change: requires complementary drivers to ensure tool is used	▪ Drives specific changes; requires complementary drivers for other impacts	▪ Expected to drive transformation of system

Source: adapted from Raffe (2009a).

Along with other commentators, I have contributed to this celebratory account of the SCQF. I have drawn lessons of the kinds summarized above and argued that they were applicable to NQFs elsewhere (e.g. Raffe 2007; Raffe et al. 2007-08). However, an alternative perspective, which I shall call the "sceptical account" of the SCQF, challenges the celebratory account in three respects.

▪ First, it points out that much of the SCQF's achievement can be attributed, not to the framework per se, but to the series of reforms which preceded it. These paved the way for the SCQF by introducing such features as unitization, credit and a reasonably coherent set of levels. They also introduced concepts of

learning outcomes across much of education and training, and supported changes in pedagogy and content, for example updating vocational qualifications and aligning them more closely with labour-market needs.

▪ Second, these reforms did not all correspond to the ideal type of a communications framework. Many more closely resembled reforming, if not transformational, frameworks: they were compulsory, introduced by government or central agencies to reform aspects of the education and training system and to establish more or less tightly-specified sectoral frameworks; some of which survive as sub-frameworks of the SCQF.

▪ Third, the additional impact of bringing these sub-frameworks together in the comprehensive SCQF has been relatively modest. The SCQF has linked the SQA portfolio and university degrees, the sub-frameworks owned by its main partners, but it has been slow to accommodate other qualifications, and evidence of direct impact on objectives such as increased access and transfer is limited. This sceptical account suggests that the lessons from the celebratory account need to be qualified. The SCQF does not necessarily demonstrate the superiority of a communications framework if many of its achievements were the product, not of the communications SCQF, but of the reforming frameworks which preceded it.

Both accounts, I will argue, provide insights into the SCQF and what other countries may learn from it. Moreover, the sceptical account draws attention to the sequence of reforms that have created the SCQF. The lessons from the Scottish experience are not to be drawn from the SCQF alone; the earlier reforms are a further rich source of policy learning. It also draws attention to the way the process has consisted of a shifting balance between reforms which developed sub-frameworks and reforms which brought two or more sub-frameworks into a more coherent structure.

Structure of the chapter

After summarizing relevant features of the Scottish context in section 2, this chapter presents brief analyses of earlier developments that preceded the SCQF, in section 3. It then provides a somewhat more detailed account of the development and implementation of the SCQF itself, in section 4. Finally, section 5 draws out some issues from the experience of the whole sequence of reforms.

2. Context

Scotland occupies the northern third of the land mass of Great Britain. A large proportion of its population of 5 million lives in the central belt, which includes the large conurbation centred on Glasgow. However, large areas of the north-west and the south are more sparsely populated, or consist of islands, requiring different models of educational provision. Traditionally an emigrant country, Scotland has recently attracted larger numbers of immigrants, with a net annual influx of more than 20,000 in the mid-2000s, including migrants from

new member states of the European Union. This inflow appears to be declining in the current recession.[37]

Scotland has been part of Great Britain, and subsequently the United Kingdom, since 1707. Its education system - already more developed than that of England and shaped by the Protestant Reformation led by John Knox - remained separate; from 1872 to 1999 Scottish schools and colleges were administered by a 'territorial' department of the Government of the United Kingdom, eventually known as the Scottish Office. Universities and industrial training came under Scottish Office control in 1992 and 1994 respectively. This 'administrative devolution' permitted a considerable degree of Scottish autonomy, exercised by an administrative and professional elite which included senior professionals (led by the Inspectorate), civil servants in central government and the directors of education in local authorities, which run schools and ran the colleges before 1992 (Paterson 2000).

In 1999, the Scottish Parliament was established with devolved powers including education and training. The Scottish Office was replaced by the Scottish Executive (renamed Scottish Government in 2007) which had similar functions (at least with respect to education and training) but was now accountable to the Scottish Parliament. This has resulted in a modest divergence in education policy between Scotland and England. The Scottish Parliament is elected every four years by a proportional representation system, which makes it unlikely that any party will achieve a majority of seats. The first two administrations, in 1999-2003 and 2003-07, were coalitions of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties; in 2007 the Scottish National Party formed a minority government.

Electoral arrangements may accentuate pre-existing styles of policy-making. The 'received wisdom' is that policy-making in Scottish education is based on 'consensus, partnership and consultation' (Humes 2008, p. 71). It also relies on informality and flexibility: it tends to avoid regulation, compulsion and entitlement. However, informality of control is not the same as absence of control, nor do partnership and consultation mean that all partners have an equal voice. The administrative and professional elite includes provider interests and a degree of 'producer capture'; it aims to be consensual but it is consensus among this elite, rather than among a broader public, which matters most. This policy style results in what might be described as progressive conservatism: it pursues evolutionary, inclusive and progressive reform, but not at the expense of challenging existing hierarchies and power relationships. However, a legacy of past constitutional structures is the relatively weak representation of employer interests. Employer bodies have generally been supportive of education and training developments but they have not, until very recently, been conspicuous among its drivers.

Three other aspects of the context of Scottish educational policy-making are relevant to the development of the SCQF. The first is scale. The Scottish policy community is relatively small. The leading members of this community can meet each other in the same room - and may meet again the next day, wearing

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[37] GRO 2009.

different hats. If consensus does not already exist, it is easier to pursue it through face-to-face discussion. It is also easier for two or three individuals who share a vision to drive it forward. The second aspect is institutional uniformity. The number of different types of institutions of Scottish education is relatively small, and organization and standards tend to be consistent among institutions of each type. This reduces the number of interests that have to be consulted, and contributes further to the informal, partnership style of policy-making. It also contributes to its centralized character: for example, school-college collaboration can more easily be discussed at national level than in a diverse system such as England where there are many different types of schools and different types of colleges. The third aspect is the tradition of public provision. There is a strong expectation that education should be provided free, for all citizens and in the public interest. The legitimacy both of local government, which directly administers schools, and of the central government which leads policy-making, is accepted to a greater extent than in many countries influenced by neo-liberal ideas.

Schooling is compulsory from the age of 5 to 16, and there is an entitlement to free part-time pre-school provision for 3- and 4-year-olds. Children attend primary school for seven years followed by four to six years of secondary school. About 5 per cent of pupils (more in Edinburgh) attend private schools. The others attend schools run by elected local authorities, which are free, comprehensive and co-educational. Parents have a choice of school, but children from the designated catchment area have priority. The school curriculum is mainly general and leads to single-subject Standard Grade qualifications taken at the end of fourth year at age 15/16. About two-thirds of pupils stay at school for a fifth year (to age 17), and nearly a half stay for a sixth year (to age 18). Pupils attempt further single-subject National Qualifications, available at a range of levels, in fifth and sixth year; those at Higher and Advanced Higher level provide the main currency for entry to higher education. Most undergraduates in higher education institutions (HEIs) take 4-year Honours degrees, but some take other qualifications including the more traditional 3-year Ordinary degree. Nearly half the age group enters higher education, but nearly a third of these enter a college rather than an HEI, typically to take a short-cycle Higher National Certificate or Diploma (HNC or HND) awarded by the SQA. The origin and development of many of these qualifications are described in section 3 below.

Nearly a quarter of school leavers enter a full-time course at a college; others study part-time at college, possibly as part of a Modern Apprenticeship or training programme. Scotland's 43 colleges are multi-purpose institutions providing vocational and general opportunities to learners aged 16 upwards, and to school pupils aged 14 plus. More than half of students are aged 25 or over. Colleges have a tradition of access and responsiveness to employer and individual needs, and their courses vary in length, in mode of delivery, in content and in level. Nearly a quarter of college activity is at higher education level, consisting mainly of HNCs, HNDs and shorter professional awards. Other courses lead to a variety of qualifications including group awards based on National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications and awards of employer and professional organizations or of other awarding bodies such as City and Guilds.

Other learning provision includes workplace training, adult education and community-based learning, including by voluntary organizations and local authorities. A new body, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), was established in 2008 to manage government training programmes, the all-age careers service and

labour-market intelligence. As in the rest of the United Kingdom, employer engagement in education, training and skills development has been a continuing challenge. A UK-wide network of Sector Skills Councils is intended to represent employers' interests and skill needs and to determine occupational standards. Some of their functions are specific to England; in Scotland their roles include representing employers in the design of learning and qualifications (Scottish Government 2007). Their effectiveness is variable, as is the support they receive from employers.

The Scottish economy is largely based on service industries, and financial services, tourism, health and education are major sources of employment. Many traditional primary and manufacturing industries such as coal, steel and shipbuilding largely disappeared in the late twentieth century. The labour market is substantially integrated with that of the United Kingdom as a whole. It is flexible, with weak regulation and weak occupational labour markets. National occupational standards, on which vocational qualifications are based, are defined for the whole United Kingdom. Most do not require a qualification as a 'licence to practice'; exceptions include most liberal professions and occupations affected by health and safety issues. The number of regulated occupations has increased, and new qualification requirements have been introduced in areas such as social care and the private security industry.

The rhetoric of the knowledge economy and the need for skills has been influential in Scottish policy discourses. Scottish skill levels are higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom - at least, as crudely measured by qualifications - but productivity growth is lower. The current Scottish Government has therefore focused policy attention on the demand and especially the utilization of skills rather than on the supply, and has seen the SCQF as an instrument for pursuing this (Scottish Government 2007). It has also continued previous governments' concerns with the high proportion of young Scots not in education, employment or training - one of the highest proportions in the OECD (Scottish Executive 2006). This problem reflects low participation in education and training rather than low rates of employment, and it has focused policy attention on engaging young people for as long as they remain in compulsory education and providing a range of opportunities for them when they leave. Unemployment is growing again in the current recession, especially among the less skilled. It is geographically concentrated, like other factors associated with poverty and social deprivation. Glasgow and other former industrial centres in the west are most affected. An index of multiple deprivation applied to data zones in the 2001 Census showed that more than half of Glasgow belonged to the 15 per cent most deprived zones nationally.

3.   Previous reforms

In this section, I review the experience of the reforms that preceded the launch of the SCQF. Readers who simply wish to identify the key points are invited to turn to the end of the section where the main themes from this experience are summarized; they are also presented schematically in Figure 2.

Standard Grade: Universal certification at 16

Standard Grades, 2-year process-based school courses for 14-16-year-olds, were phased in from 1984. Each subject is separately certificated and students typically take eight subjects. Most subjects are available at three levels, and students can attempt the qualifications at two adjacent levels in order to have a fall-back if they fail at the higher level. Grades are awarded on a six-point scale - two for each level of award - with a combination of examinations and other assessment modes based on 'grade-related criteria'.

The main purposes of the Standard Grade reform were to update the curriculum, encourage more active learning and introduce 'assessment for all' - the title of one of the two 1977 reports which provided its blueprint. Existing qualifications for 16-year-olds had been designed for the top 30 per cent of the ability range; after the minimum school-leaving age was raised to 16 in 1973 a large minority of pupils languished in 'non-Certificate' classes, outside the 'moral community' of the school (Gray et al. 1983). The development programme for Standard Grade was prolonged: early encouragement for school-based development was reined back in favour of a more streamlined, coherent approach. The complex assessment arrangements and the threatened increase in workloads led to teacher resistance and a compromise in which the original plans were revised by a 'simplification committee' (Simpson 2006).

Standard Grades did not constitute a qualifications framework in the modern sense but they contributed the principle of comprehensive coverage, as well as concepts of criterion-referenced assessment and levels of learning, to the Scottish qualifications system. They made the system more inclusive and led to a slight narrowing of social inequalities in attainment (Gamoran 1996); they remain well-regarded among many Scottish educationists.

Action Plan/National Certificate: National modular framework for non-advanced 'vocational' education

Published in January 1983 and largely implemented in 1984-85, the Action Plan introduced a modular framework, based on a single national catalogue of some 2000 modules, to replace nearly all non-advanced vocational education in colleges and to provide opportunities for learners in schools and on training schemes (SED 1983). A single national body (the Scottish Vocational Education Council: SCOTVEC) was established to manage the catalogue and award the certificates. Each module was of notional 40-hour length (with some half- and double-modules). A full-time student might take up to 20 modules in a year; to begin with, modules were listed individually on a single National Certificate (NC), although colleges often gave each programme a group title. Modules were not described by levels: this was considered to be inconsistent with the prevailing concept of outcomes. Modules were defined by performance outcomes and associated performance criteria; the module descriptors suggested appropriate learning and teaching approaches and contexts of learning, but module contents were not specified in detail and lecturers and teachers had substantial discretion in how to 'flesh them out' each module. NC modules were internally assessed - that is, by college staff rather than external examiners - with a simple pass/fail outcome. The Action Plan aimed to integrate education and training and preserve broad, general education within vocational programmes; it included generic modules such as personal and social development as well as general subjects

such as communication, mathematics, languages and (over time) other more 'academic' subjects. As a result, NC modules were used extensively in schools, either to complement the academic curriculum or to fill gaps, especially among learners whose earlier attainments made it inadvisable to attempt many Highers. They were also used to certificate young people on youth training schemes, whose numbers had mushroomed due to youth unemployment. Initially intended for 16-18s, they were also used in curricular developments for 14-16 year-olds and they proved popular with adults as they provided national recognition for small units of learning.

> 'The move to an outcomes-based qualifications system which was at the heart of Action Plan seemed logically ... to rule out distinctions based on the age of the learner or the place of learning - an innovation in policy terms.' (Hart and Tuck 2007, p. 107)

The Action Plan had several purposes. It addressed low levels of post-16 participation by providing more opportunities especially for 'less academic' learners. It responded to high youth unemployment levels by encouraging participation in education and providing opportunities for certification for training schemes. It aimed to update the college curriculum, and to provide a flexible structure that would make it responsive to future changes in labour market needs. It similarly aimed to change pedagogies, and to move away from didactic approaches. It aimed to rationalize provision, by simplifying the array of vocational qualifications and providing a modular structure which could reduce duplication of provision. Underlying all these aims, it sought to increase central control over the system, partly at the expense of institutions. Modules were 'institutionally versatile' and no longer owned by colleges and departments - although institutions could develop their own modules. In addition, at a time when the boundary between (Scottish-controlled) education and (UK-controlled) training was increasingly blurred, it was an attempt by Scottish authorities to assert control over vocational education and training (Raffe 1985).

The Action Plan was education-led, and employers played a secondary role (mainly through representation on SCOTVEC's sector boards). It was a top-down reform, led by the Inspectorate which was then located within the government. Colleges had little choice but to comply. A threatened boycott by college lecturers only delayed the process of making modules available to private training providers (Philip 1992). The reform also exploited the colleges' reputation of responsiveness and flexibility. The speedy introduction of modules - 18 months from policy document to implementation - contrasts with the much longer time-lag associated with Standard Grades.

The reform introduced a more up-to-date curriculum and created a structure which enabled it to respond more flexibly to future changes in labour market demands and policy environments. It encouraged a shift from didactic pedagogies to practical approaches, although this varied across colleges and subject areas. If staff interpreted the modular assessment requirements too narrowly, the learning experience could become fragmented (Scottish Office 1991). In schools, the modules met important curricular needs, but they had lower status than academic courses and they were often offered on an arbitrary basis, depending on staff availability, rather than student need. The contrasting ethos and pedagogies of modules and academic courses further undermined the coherence of the curricular experience. The aspiration that the NC would enhance access, transfer and progression was only realized to a limited extent. Research on the Action Plan coined the terms 'intrinsic logic' and 'institutional

logic' to express this finding (Raffe 1988). The 'intrinsic logic' of a qualifications framework may promote 'seamless' access, credit transfer and progression through the modular system; but in practice, participation and progression continued to be determined by 'institutional logics' associated with educational institutions and the wider social context. The NC framework straddled institutional boundaries, but these boundaries seemed as important as ever; the probability of taking modules, the pattern of learning and the progression prospects associated with them, continued to be determined primarily by institutional location. Credit transfer was limited (many young people had to repeat school modules in college) and patterns of inequality remained substantially unchanged. Nor was there much evidence of greater efficiency achieved through reducing duplication; the number of modules in the catalogue was under constant pressure to increase (Croxford et al. 1991; Howieson 1992).

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs): A national framework of competence-based occupational qualifications

SVQs will be discussed more briefly, as many of the issues parallel those of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) described in the country study for England. NVQs were introduced in the rest of the United Kingdom in 1986. They were outcomes-based, unitized, occupational qualifications, based on National Occupational Standards and allocated to one of five levels. They were not initially extended to Scotland because their declared purpose of rationalizing vocational qualifications had already been addressed by the Action Plan. They were based on a narrower concept of competence than NC modules and they were more tightly specified; among other requirements assessment had to be carried out under workplace conditions. These differences, together with their apparent rejection of the NC philosophy of integrating education and training, and the fact that their design and their underpinning standards were determined at United Kingdom level led to strong opposition to their introduction in Scotland - especially from SCOTVEC (Raggatt and Williams 1999). However, Scottish protests were overruled and in 1989 it was announced that SVQs would be developed along similar lines to NVQs.

SVQs and NVQs share a common history of successive reviews and revisions. As in England, they were criticized for their narrow specification, over-assessment, cost and bureaucracy, and their implementation was largely driven by the requirement that they be offered on publicly-funded training programmes (Robinson 1998). Despite the rhetoric that they were employer-driven and work-based, the colleges played a large part in their delivery (Canning 1998). However, over time they have found their niche and they have become a more settled and accepted part of the Scottish qualification landscape. Ironically, SVQs are surviving in Scotland even as NVQs in England are being subsumed within the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

*The Advanced Courses Development Programme
    (ACDP): Unitization of HNCs and HNDs (short-
    cycle higher education awards)*

The ACDP, launched after a consultation in 1987, extended the principles of the Action Plan to SCOTVEC's short-cycle higher education awards, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs), delivered mainly in colleges (SCOTVEC 1988). These were redesigned on the basis of 40-hour unit credits. In contrast to NC, the group award titles (HNC and HND) were retained, although certificates could also be awarded for individual units. HNCs and HNDs had previously been distinct awards for part-time and full-time study respectively, but it now became possible to build on a 12-credit HNC in order to achieve a 30-credit HND. An agreement with the awarding body for non-university Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) permitted similar articulation with degrees (HEQC 1993).

The programme's purposes were similar to those of the Action Plan and were in many respects its natural consequence. When SCOTVEC was created, it took responsibility for HNC and HNDs alongside the Action Plan. These awards were poorly articulated with the NC; their specification differed between the pre-existing awarding bodies; they were traditional in format, assessed largely by examinations; and their content was perceived to be out of date. The programme also aimed to promote innovation at the college level by providing 'significant devolution' of responsibility for curriculum content, programme planning and assessment to the colleges (SCOTVEC 1988, p. 1). It was led by SCOTVEC and combined central and local activities.

The reform was generally welcomed. The evaluation of the development programme found that college staff and other participants particularly valued the opportunity to articulate with degree provision, although views on articulation with the NC were more mixed (Black et al. 1992). However, this increased flexibility created a dilemma which subsequent reports would highlight: the easier it became to progress from an HND to a degree, the harder it became to preserve the HND's character as an exit qualification leading into employment. In the event, different HNDs tended to develop different emphases, on educational or labour market progression respectively. The devolution of control over content promoted innovation in colleges but led to a diversity of HNCs and HNDs which threatened their national currency. The next round of reform, in the early 2000s, would rationalize HNCs and HNDs, reduce the number of titles and establish greater national consistency in content.

*The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer
    (SCOTCAT): A national credit and accumulation
    system for higher education*

The SCOTCAT Scheme was launched in 1991 as the credit system for higher education in Scotland. It established a currency of one credit equal to ten hours' study time (later redefined as the notional learning time for the average student to achieve the outcomes). The normal workload of each year of a full-time programme was assumed to comprise 1,200 hours or 120 credit points. Each course unit was given a credit-rating of four to 120 points, and assigned to one of five levels of higher education study: four corresponding to the four-year Honours degree and a fifth for Masters. Minimum volumes and levels of credit points were specified for each type of university award (CNAA 1991).

SCOTCAT was initiated by the Scottish office of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), the body which awarded degrees gained in public sector HEIs before they became universities in 1992. Thereafter it was jointly owned by the organization responsible for quality assurance in higher education (now the Quality Assurance Agency) and HEIs (through their representative body, currently Universities Scotland), who agreed to cooperate to develop credit-based learning (McGoldrick 1999). Its initial focus was 'to facilitate inter-institutional student mobility, to promote work with employers and professional bodies, and to offer student guidance and academic staff development' (HEQC 1993, p. 99).

By 1992, all HEIs had signed up to SCOTCAT and agreed to modify their provision to fit with it. At that time its use was mainly confined to relatively self-contained CAT schemes in a few HEIs, mainly those formerly involved with the CNAA. There followed a period of rapid development focused especially on modular undergraduate programmes and on professional qualifications and continuing professional development in health, social work and teacher education. Institutions increasingly used the framework to organize and describe their programmes, to support mixed-mode delivery and to provide links and routes to other award frameworks and work-based learning. However, although SCOTCAT - and subsequently the SCQF - moved credit-based learning from a few niches to the mainstream of higher education, the uses of the provision continue to be highly variable across HEIs (McGoldrick 1999). To use the concepts developed in relation to the Action Plan, we may say that despite the common intrinsic logic of the SCOTCAT framework, its application varied according to the diverse institutional logics of Scottish higher education.

Development was faster than elsewhere in the United Kingdom (HEQC 1993). This partly reflected the relatively small scale and cohesiveness of Scottish higher education, especially after funding and governance were devolved to Scotland in 1992. Despite their diversity Scottish HEIs were able to aggregate their interests and act in concert, a factor which later proved critical for the SCQF. An additional factor was the large sector of HNC and HND provision in colleges, which provided newer universities with a potential source of recruitment.

Higher Still: A 'unified curriculum and assessment system' of new National Qualifications for post-16 learning in schools and colleges

Higher Still, implemented from 1999, replaced academic upper-secondary courses and 'vocational' NC modules with a unified framework (Scottish Office 1994). Its design was a hybrid of the previous qualifications, based on units which could be grouped into courses and a combination of internal unit assessment and external course assessment. Units and courses were structured as a 'climbing frame' with seven levels: the top two levels corresponded to existing upper-secondary courses, but new levels were added to make the system more inclusive. The original plans proposed five levels, but the bottom level was split into three, of which the lowest level, for which no level descriptors are provided, includes provision for learners with profound and severe learning difficulties.

Higher Still aimed to provide 'opportunity for all', and especially for less-qualified 16-year-olds who were continuing in education in increasing numbers. It built on NC modules but aimed to address their limitations: their low status,

their arbitrary provision and the incoherent mixture of pedagogies and assessment approaches arising from the combination of NC modules and more traditional academic courses in the post-16 school curriculum. It also aimed to promote parity of esteem for vocational and academic learning and to promote the five 'core skills' of communication, numeracy, Information and Communication Technology (ITC) skills, problem-solving and working with others. It reflected a 'unifying logic' which drove greater coherence and integration in post-compulsory education (Raffe 2003a). Its aims and strategy attracted wide support, partly because it appealed to both left and right of the political spectrum. To the left, it offered wider opportunities, greater equality and an extension of the principles of comprehensive education to post-compulsory learning; to the right, it promised choice and flexibility, responsiveness and the promotion of vocational learning.

Despite this broad support, Higher Still was education-driven, even more than the Action Plan. Employer interests were supportive but their main influence was to maintain the priority for core skills. SVQs and most work-based learning were not included in the new unified framework. To support the development process, the Government undertook the largest consultation exercise in the history of Scottish education. Nevertheless, the more powerful academic interests had most influence over the reform's conception and development, and many college and vocational interests felt disappointed by the outcome (Raffe et al. 2007). Moreover, the need to develop a comprehensive framework to cover all levels, types and locations of post-16 education tended to disenfranchise participants who could represent their own sector's interest but lacked the resources or the frame of reference to consider the system-wide issues (Raffe et al. 2002). The development and implementation processes were widely perceived as 'top-down', and there was resentment that key elements of the proposals - notably the assessment arrangements - were not put out to consultation.

SCOTVEC was merged with the schools examination body to create the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which assumed responsibility for the new qualifications. The first year of implementation (1999-2000) culminated in an 'exams crisis' which led to delays and inaccuracies in the publication of results. This was caused by a combination of circumstances in which the increased assessment burden and complex assessment model were factors. The resulting political crisis led to recriminations and accusations that schools and colleges had been insufficiently involved in developing the reforms. The outcomes included a re-balancing of policy-making influence, in favour of key stakeholders and especially the main educational providers, measures to reduce the assessment burden, and a growing perception that unified frameworks needed to be loosely specified to accommodate different types of learning.

Research on Higher Still concluded that it did indeed provide 'opportunity for all' in the sense of providing learning opportunities that were perceived to have value, status and relevance to a wider range of young people (Raffe et al. 2007). It was also associated with a reduction in social inequalities in participation and attainment at the 16-18 stage (Croxford 2009). However, although new National Qualifications improved access, they had less impact on progression. Designing, constructing and implementing a flexible 'climbing frame' through which all learners could progress at their own pace, mode and direction proved harder than the simple metaphor suggested (Raffe et al. 2007). Different dimensions of flexibility - such as flexible delivery and flexible pathways - were in tension with each other (Howieson et al. 2002). Less-

qualified young people continued to fail and drop out in large numbers, despite taking courses that were better tailored to their needs. And despite offering formal parity of esteem for vocational and academic learning, the unified system had only a small impact on the numbers and kinds of students who chose vocational options, at least in the short term.

Like earlier reforms, Higher Still appeared to demonstrate that parity of esteem, and patterns of participation and attainment in learning, are shaped more by the institutional logics of education and training (including macro-institutional logics: Young 2002) than by the intrinsic logic of an integrated qualifications framework. The importance of institutional logics was also evident in the different ways that schools and colleges, with their contrasting logics, implemented the reform, and in the different progression patterns in these two sectors (Raffe et al. 2007). And although this resulted in a more differentiated pattern of provision than anticipated, this was not necessarily undesirable. Higher Still encouraged a shift in expectations and perceptions among at least some Scottish policy-makers. Not only did it encourage greater realism about the capacity of a framework to achieve such goals as parity of esteem, it encouraged a shift in the perception of a unified framework from being a means to impose uniformity to a principle for coordinating diversity. It underlined the need for arrangements such as assessment procedures to be 'fit for purpose' and therefore more variable across the system.

Previous reforms: An overview

Figure 2 provides a schematic overview of the reforms discussed above. The first column briefly describes each reform. The second column lists structural features introduced by each reform that contributed to the later architecture of the SCQF. As a result, when the SCQF was launched in 2001 much of this architecture was already in place or at an advanced stage of implementation. Most mainstream Scottish qualifications were outcomes-based, albeit with varying and typically loose interpretations of outcomes. Most (except Standard Grades) were unitized. Most were placed at levels, with mainly minor differences across types of qualifications in the boundaries between levels and the ways they were defined. Most (except SVQs) were based on a concept of credit, again with relatively minor variations in definitions and metrics. There were well-established quality assurance systems for higher education and SQA qualifications. Teachers and lecturers had become familiar with the pedagogies and assessment procedures associated with a more learner-centred approach. Less tangibly, there were signs of a cultural change leading to wider recognition of concepts such as credit and to the confidence and trust necessary to underpin a qualifications system.

Moreover, by 2001 most mainstream qualifications belonged to one of three relatively distinct families: SQA's National Qualifications (including Standard Grades and group awards of varying sizes based on SQA units); higher education qualifications (SCOTCAT, with HNCs and HNDs); and SVQs. These families were to become the main sub-frameworks of the SCQF. There was a varying balance, across the sequence of reforms, between development within a sub-framework and integration across sub-frameworks; towards the end of the sequence the emphasis shifted to integration, especially in Higher Still. The 'owners' of the two largest sub-frameworks (the SQA and higher education) had an interest in continuing the drive towards a more unified and coherent qualifications system; and their staff (in the case of higher education, the staff of

its main representative and quality-assurance bodies in Scotland) had acquired the experience, expertise, strategic understanding and commitment to take this process forward.

The third column of Figure 2 summarizes the characteristics of each reform and especially its style of implementation. Most were led by government or central agencies, most aimed to achieve specific changes in their area or sector, and most were compulsory at least for their main target institutions. Some had a reasonably 'tight' design, and there was a frequent tension between the desire to engage educational institutions and other stakeholders in the development process and the essentially top-down nature of these reforms. In other words, except for SCOTCAT, the reforms that preceded SCQF more closely resemble the ideal type of a reforming framework than that of a communications framework.

The final column in Figure 2 summarizes some of the issues or lessons raised by the experience of each reform. Many of these issues recur throughout the sequence, suggesting that they reflect generic aspects of qualifications frameworks and not just specific features of individual initiatives. For example, the importance of institutional logics, the consequent need for policy breadth, the importance of assessment arrangements and the need to keep them simple, the tension between a framework's scope and its tightness, and the tendency for units in a framework to multiply, all recur throughout the sequence. And further issues are raised by the sequence as a whole: the long time scales for reform, the incremental nature of change and the crucial role of sub-frameworks in the development of an NQF as well as in its eventual architecture. Section 4 discusses lessons from the Scottish experience, drawing on the earlier reforms as well as the SCQF itself.

Figure 2.   The reforms which preceded the SCQF: An overview

Reform	Contribution to architecture and culture of SCQF	Type of framework/ style of implementation	Issues/lessons
Standard Grade: subject-specific qualifications for certificating 14-16 school courses at three overlapping levels	▪ Principle of comprehensive coverage ▪ Levels ▪ Criterion-referenced assessment ▪ *(Became part of NQ sub-framework)*	▪ Led by government ▪ Compulsory for schools ▪ Teacher participation in lengthy development programme	▪ Showed that integrated framework can cover whole cohort ▪ Need to keep assessment simple
National Certificate (NC) (Action Plan): national modular framework to replace college non-advanced provision, available to schools and private providers	▪ Unitization ▪ Learning outcomes ▪ Criterion-referenced assessment ▪ Portability/credit transfer ▪ Integration of vocational and (some) general qualifications ▪ *(Merged with academic courses to form Higher Still NQ sub-framework)*	▪ Led by government (Inspectorate) ▪ Education-led (rather than employment-led) ▪ Fast, top-down development and implementation ▪ Compulsory for colleges	▪ Constraints of institutional logics: limits to flexibility and portability ▪ Need for policy breadth ▪ Unified framework makes system more responsive ▪ Power of assessment to shape curriculum and pedagogy ▪ Growth in number of modules
Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs): national framework of occupational qualifications based on national occupational standards	▪ Unitization ▪ Learning outcomes ▪ Levels ▪ Criterion-referenced assessment ▪ *(Became sub-framework of SCQF)*	▪ Led by government ▪ Rhetoric of industry ownership; developed by government-appointed industry bodies ▪ Compulsory for government-funded training programmes	▪ Tension between coverage and tightness of framework ▪ Need for policy breadth ▪ Concerns with cost, bureaucracy ▪ Assessment requirements restrict access, increase cost
Advanced Courses Development Programme: unitization of HNCs/HNDs (sub-degree qualifications offered in colleges)	▪ Unitization ▪ Learning outcomes ▪ Criterion-referenced assessment ▪ Portability/credit transfer (including to university degrees) ▪ *(Contributed with SCOTCAT to development of HE sub-framework of SCQF)*	▪ Led by awarding body (SCOTVEC) ▪ College participation in development ▪ Effectively compulsory for colleges, but devolved control over content of programmes	▪ Similar to Action Plan ▪ Tensions between role as exit qualification and progression ▪ Devolved control to colleges led to growth in number and diversity of programmes/awards

Reform	Contribution to architecture and culture of SCQF	Type of framework/ style of implementation	Issues/lessons
Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (SCOTCAT): national credit system for higher education	- Credit (and 10-hour metric) - Levels - Learning outcomes - Unitization/modularization *(Linked with ACDP, became basis for HE sub-framework of SCQF)*	- Initially led by awarding body for non-university degrees, then by HEIs and quality assurance body - Voluntary, but all HEIs signed up	- Influence of diverse institutional logics - Institution-led implementation can be slow and variable - Use of framework by institutions even more variable
New National Qualifications (Higher Still): 'unified system' of academic and vocational post-compulsory provision in a 7-level 'climbing frame', delivered in schools and colleges	- Integration of academic and vocational qualifications - Levels - Learning outcomes - Unitization *(Linked NC modules and academic courses to create NQs, which became sub-framework of SCQF)*	- Led by government (Inspectorate) - Very wide consultation, but perceived as top-down 'Disenfranchising' effect of system-wide development	- Showed that integrated framework can cover whole cohort - Constraints of institutional logics: limits to 'climbing frame' - NQFs can't impose 'parity of esteem' - Tension between coverage and tightness of framework - Need to keep assessment simple
Sequence of reforms: Progress towards integration across sub-frameworks as well as development within sub-frameworks	Learning outcomes, levels, unitization, credit, etc., *plus* changed pedagogies and assessment and wider cultural changes	Mainly 'reforming' rather than 'communications' frameworks: strong role of central government and 'top-down' change with varying amounts and effectiveness of consultation and participation of educational institutions	- Time needed for change process - Incremental steps towards (more) comprehensive framework - Variation across sub-frameworks essential to NQF development and design - Reforms create organizations with expertise and interest in further change

Earlier in this chapter, I described a 'celebratory account' of the SCQF and suggested that this was challenged by a 'sceptical account' in three ways. This section has provided support for the first two challenges. It has shown how the groundwork for the SCQF was prepared by the reforms that preceded it; and it has shown that these earlier initiatives were closer to the model of reforming frameworks than to the SCQF's own model of a communications framework. The third challenge - the claim that the additional impact of the SCQF itself has been minimal - is explored in the next section.

4. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The origins of the SCQF

The idea of a comprehensive framework emerged in the mid-1990s among those developing the Higher Still and SCOTCAT frameworks, who discussed the possibility of bringing them together, along with SVQs, in a single national framework. In 1997, the Scottish Committee of the UK-wide Dearing Inquiry into Higher Education recommended 'an integrated qualifications framework based around level of study and Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme credit points' (NCIHE 1997, p. 39). Interestingly, this recommendation was addressed not to the Government, but to four other organizations: the SQA; the body (now Universities Scotland) which represented HEIs; the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); and the committee which managed SCOTCAT. However the Government gave its support and in its lifelong learning strategy document it promised to 'join a group to develop the Framework'; optimistically expecting this 'to be in place by August 1999' (Scottish Office 1998, p. 63).

In March 1999, three higher education bodies, the SQA and the Government published a consultation paper with outline proposals for a framework based on the key concepts of the level of outcomes of learning and the volume of outcomes of learning (COSHEP et al. 1999). It proposed that the levels defined by existing frameworks could be brought together in a single 11-level framework. Volume would be measured using the SCOTCAT principle of one credit point representing the outcomes achieved through ten 'notional hours of learning time'.

The response to the consultation was positive and in 2000 a development and implementation plan was agreed by the four 'development partners' as they were now known: the SQA; Universities Scotland (as the body representing HEIs was now known); the QAA; and the newly-devolved Scottish Government. Activities covered by the plan included developing the framework, placing the main qualifications within it (by 2003) and establishing the SCQF as the main language of learning. The SCQF was officially launched as a 12-level framework in December 2001, on the basis of a document which outlined its principles and structure, including level descriptors which were 'offered as a first working guide and will be revised in the light of feedback on their use' (SCQF 2001, p. 26).

Governance

At the time of its formal launch, and its first implementation plan for 2002-06, the framework was led by the four development partners advised by a Joint Advisory Committee which represented the main stakeholders including employers, professional bodies, community organizations and other education and training interests. The development partners took forward much of the work of the framework, often in their roles as 'owners' of the main qualifications. Much of the early work of the framework consisted of bringing the existing sub-frameworks together, as well as drawing up procedures and principles for expanding the framework and for using it for different purposes including the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer. The SCQF had very little

capacity in its own right; in the year of its launch it had a single full-time employee; a development officer.

This structure has changed in two main ways. In 2006, the colleges' representative body became the fifth development partner, after a long period of seeking admission. And in November 2006, the SCQF Partnership was re-launched as a not-for-profit company, owned by the development partners (who nominate the Board of Directors) but with stronger executive powers and a larger staff (eight at the time of writing). A new SCQF Quality Committee is responsible for maintaining the SCQF guidelines, ensuring consistency in the process and criteria for admitting qualifications and learning to the framework (credit-rating - see below) and aligning the SCQF with other national and international frameworks. The Joint Advisory Committee is replaced by an SCQF Forum, which represents the main stakeholder interests and promotes the use of the framework as well as providing feedback on its design and implementation.

Role of stakeholders

The SCQF has been initiated, owned and substantially driven by the 'owners' of the two main sub-frameworks: by the SQA and by higher education. The Government has played a supportive and often key role, facilitating and stimulating movement, but it has been careful not to assume sole or even principal ownership. Key stakeholders and participants in the early development of the SCQF argued that the framework would be undermined if the Government were seen to take it over, and this seemed to have been accepted by the Government itself (Raffe 2003b).

Other education and training institutions have had less direct influence. In the early years the colleges were not included among the development partners; a fact they resented. More than any other sector, the colleges have an interest in a strong and successful framework, and they have sometimes felt frustrated by their inability to shape it as they would wish. For example, one of the main areas where the framework aims to promote credit transfer and flexibility is in the college/university transition. The SCQF provides a basis for transferring credit from college sub-degree to university degree qualifications, but whereas college interests tend to feel that transfer should occur as a matter of course, university interests wish to retain their discretion over whether or not to recognize credit. The pretext for excluding colleges from the development partners was that the framework was led by the bodies which awarded qualifications: the universities awarded degrees, whereas most college qualifications were awarded by the SQA. The pretext for later including the colleges was that they did award some qualifications in their own right. In both cases, the pretext masked underlying issues of control. The Joint Advisory Committee was set up to preserve a balance between the desire of the development partners to control the framework and the need to engage stakeholders, and it managed this task effectively.

Other stakeholders have had a more marginal and advisory role. There have been recurrent concerns that the framework has not sufficiently engaged employers and professional bodies, and similar concerns have been expressed in relation to community organizations. However, employers and other stakeholders are represented in the arrangements for shaping the 'sub-frameworks' of the SCQF, notably for SQA's vocational qualifications and for SVQs; their motivations for engaging with the SCQF, other than through its component

qualifications, tend to be somewhat different. The issues in engaging stakeholders with the SCQF *per se* are similar to those of other education-led reforms - for example, it is easier to engage representative employer bodies, which have been supportive and often actively engaged, than individual employers whose engagement has been patchy.

Aims and purposes

The SCQF's launch document described its 'general aims' as to:

- "help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;

- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce." (SCQF 2001, p. vii)

Seen in isolation from its component sub-frameworks, the SCQF is thus a classic case of a communications framework, which takes the existing education and training system as its starting point and aims to make it more transparent and easier to understand, in order to rationalize it, to improve its coherence, to encourage access and to highlight opportunities for transfer and progression between programmes.

In addition to this more or less consensual purpose, the main stakeholders have had specific motivations for taking part. A study of the introduction of the SCQF, based on interviews with leading participants, observed:

> The role of HE [higher education] was critical. When asked why HE had taken the lead, given that it was already developing SCOTCAT and had less to gain than other sectors from a wider framework, one interviewee replied 'altruism'. Another said that HE was looking to the future, and to changing patterns of recruitment especially from [colleges]. A third view referred to the recent (1992) devolution of responsibility for the Scottish universities to the Scottish Office, and the creation of a separate Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. The SCQF provided an opportunity for the 'repatriated' Scottish HE system to determine its own path and to strengthen its links with the rest of Scottish education. The Scottish Office of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), one of the main protagonists of the SCQF, also wished to embed itself within the Scottish system and to increase its autonomy from its UK parent body. Moreover, by leading the framework HE could help to shape it, and thereby avoid the experience of other countries such as South Africa and New Zealand where HE has felt excluded from the development of national qualifications frameworks (Young 2001, Mikuta 2002). I suspect there is some truth in all these explanations, and in a further one: like many Scottish initiatives, the SCQF owed its birth to the enthusiasm and commitment of a few key individuals. (Raffe 2003b, pp. 245-246)

The SQA's purposes reflected its status as the national qualifications body for Scotland, and its origins as the body created to develop and administer the unified curriculum and qualifications framework of National Qualifications. A reform which linked that framework to other SQA qualifications such as Higher Nationals and SVQs, and to other Scottish qualifications, would both continue that unifying drive and confirm the SQA's position as a national body (and its semi-monopoly). Many SQA staff, especially those who had joined from SCOTVEC, had long experience of innovation in credit and flexibility on which the SCQF could build.

With respect to the SCQF's wider political appeal, there is little evidence that the support for the SCQF was driven by the kind of 'neo-liberal' political agenda that is claimed to have driven NQFs elsewhere (Philips 1998, Allais 2003, Young 2007). Instead, it appealed to a more consensual political viewpoint which advocated a more unified, open and flexible learning system as a means both to respond to economic demands and to promote opportunity, wider access and social inclusion. For example, in the Scottish Parliament's first session, an influential Committee report proposed a lifelong learning strategy based on the principles of economy, social justice, citizenship and quality. It welcomed the SCQF as a means both to 'build bridges ... between the worlds of work and learning' and to create an 'open and accessible learning environment' (Scottish Parliament 2002, p. 23).

The motivations and perspectives of most other stakeholder groups were influenced by similar values and perceptions. Employers, professional organizations and trades unions were broadly supportive, even if awareness and use of the framework took time to spread beyond their national leaderships and representative bodies. The colleges were the closest of all sectors of education and training to the SCQF philosophy which combined skill acquisition, responsiveness to economic need, wider access and social inclusion. They had a strong interest in any development which facilitated and reinforced their role as flexible, responsive providers of learning opportunities, and as the sector which interfaced with all other sectors of learning (schools, universities, workplaces, and so on).

Structure

The SCQF Partnership's current diagram is shown in Figure 3. The SCQF was created by bringing together sub-frameworks, although it also accommodates qualifications that do not belong to a sub-framework. This explains its 'loose' specification: the SCQF was designed to overarch existing sub-frameworks in a coherent way; it was intended neither to establish new qualifications nor to overhaul existing ones. It also explains how elements of the structure came to be established.

Levels 1-11 of the SCQF were based on the seven levels of National Qualifications and the five levels of SCOTCAT (these two sub-frameworks overlap at SCQF level 7). An additional level 12 was added to cover doctoral study. The five SVQ levels were slotted in to this framework, with some SVQ levels allowed to straddle two or more SCQF levels. Level descriptors specify 'characteristic generic outcomes' for each level (except level 1) under five headings: knowledge and understanding; practice (applied knowledge and understanding); generic cognitive skills; communication, ICT and numeracy skills; autonomy, accountability and working with others. These drew on pre-existing descriptors including those for the SCOTCAT framework and the subsequent QAA benchmarks for degrees, National Qualifications (including Standard Grade and Higher Still grade descriptors and SQA's core skills framework) and SVQs. The current (2009) descriptors are the same as those published in 2001, despite the stated intention to revise them in the light of experience. Credit was based on the SCOTCAT definition, with one credit point representing the outcomes achieved through ten notional hours of learning time.

Figure 3. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications		Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12			Doctoral degree	
11			Integrated Masters degree / Masters Degree Post Graduate Diploma Post Graduate Certificate	SVQ 5
10			Honours degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	
9			Bachelors/Ordinary degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate	
8		Higher National Diploma	Diploma of Higher Education	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate	Certificate of Higher Education	SVQ 3 *(levels 6 and 7)*
6	Higher			
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade			SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade			SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade			
2	Access 2			
1	Access 1			

Professional Development Award *(levels 6-12)*

National Certificate* *(levels 2-6)*

National Progression Award *(levels 2-6)*

*National Certificates (NCs): group awards based on National Units (not NC modules introduced by Action Plan).

Source: SCQF 2009: adapted from diagram in http://www.scqf.org.uk [1 Nov. 2009].

The SCQF itself does not specify types of awards, but some of its sub-frameworks do so, typically by stating the number of credit points at each level required for a given award. Most SQA awards require at least half the credit volume to be at the level of the award, but this is not true for all awards in the SCQF. For example, a Bachelors degree at Honours level requires 480 credit points, but only 90 of these have to be at level 10, the level of the award.

To be placed in the framework, qualifications and (where applicable) their component units must be placed at a level of the framework, assigned a given number of credit points and assessed in a valid, reliable and quality-assured manner. The development partners are responsible for placing their own qualifications in the framework; credit-rating is the name given to the process for admitting other bodies' qualifications. According to the SCQF Handbook, it is 'a process of professional judgement ... exercised by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill' (SCQF 2007, p. 13). The level descriptors, key instruments in the credit-rating process, 'give broad, general, but meaningful indicators of the characteristics of learning at each level. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level.' (ibid., p. 7) The SCQF is outcomes-based, but it is not an 'outcomes-led' framework of the kind described by Young and Allais (2009), where outcomes are expected to be interpreted and applied independently of their institutional context.

And for the same reason the SCQF does not correspond to the ideal type of a framework which seeks to remove control over education and training from professional educators and trainers. If anything, the reverse may be true: the reference to professional judgement could be understood as reinforcing the 'producer capture' and professional leadership which has long been a theme within Scottish educational governance. And the same may be said of arrangements for credit-rating. Initially, only the SQA and HEIs were able to credit-rate for the SCQF. This function was exercised primarily with respect to their own qualifications, but the SQA and one or two universities established facilities which offered their credit-rating services to other awarding bodies. However, the slow pace at which other qualifications were included led to pressures to expand the number of credit-rating bodies. After a pilot in 2005-06, the colleges were allowed to become credit-rating bodies and a further pilot and consultation in 2007-08 led to new criteria and procedures being established under which other organizations could gain credit-rating powers. In 2009, it was announced that this status would be given to two professional bodies (representing banking and management respectively), City and Guilds (a UK awarding body) and the Scottish Police College. Credit-rating bodies will typically use this capacity to place their own qualifications in the SCQF, so appropriate quality assurance arrangements are an important condition of being granted credit-rating powers. The first activity in the SCQF's 2009-11 operational plan commits the Quality Committee to 'develop and implement quality processes that are robust and transparent in order to support credit rating for the SCQF' (SCQF 2009, p. 2). New guidelines and procedures will be published in the revised SCQF Handbook later in 2009.

Implementation

The SQA and HEIs have been responsible for modifications needed to adapt their own qualifications to the SCQF. Further changes were needed to the design of some SQA qualifications. For example, the units comprising HNCs and HNDs had to be allocated to the two levels (7 and 8) covered by these awards, and the number of units comprising an HNC was increased from 12 to 15. The credit values of National Qualifications were recalibrated, changing the relative credit values of courses at different levels. Several courses, especially in higher education, had to be newly assigned to levels or to sub-levels as well as given credit values. To some extent, this process was coordinated nationally, primarily to ensure compliance with the Bologna requirements (the compatibility

of the higher education part of the SCQF with the European Higher Education Area framework was formally verified in 2006). However, much of the adaptation in higher education programmes and qualifications took place as part of routine processes of programme review and development and quality enhancement, or were arranged to coincide with processes (such as modularization and semesterization) which institutions embarked on for their own purposes. The SCQF provided a context and, as described below, a 'useful tool' for these institutional processes. It also provided tools for the revision and renewal of SQA awards since 2001, including a re-design of NQ group awards and current proposals for replacing Standard Grades.

SVQs proved harder to include for a number of reasons: the levels had to be aligned with the SCQF; their more extreme 'outcomes-based' philosophy made it harder to apply a concept of credit based on notional learning time; their ownership was more dispersed, and many were owned by UK-based industry bodies; and it was inadvisable to make major changes before it was clear what kind of model would emerge from the reform of NVQs in the rest of the United Kingdom.

By 2005, the SCQF could claim that most 'mainstream' qualifications were in the framework. However, in the same year, the Government-sponsored evaluation of the SCQF reported slow progress in the inclusion of vocational and work-based qualifications, professional qualifications and community-based learning, although it noted strong potential in these areas. It attributed this slow progress, in part, to the partnership model (Gallacher et al. 2005). The SCQF did not have adequate central resources; much of the work was contributed by officers of the development partners 'trying to do it in [their] lunchtimes once a week' (Raffe 2003b, p. 247). Disagreements were not quickly resolved and further delayed progress. And while the partnership model might have been effective in developing the SCQF and getting the main sub-frameworks to link to each other, it was less suited to an implementation process which needed to engage a wider range of qualifications and of stakeholders. These concerns led to the creation of the new SCQF Partnership in November 2006. In the following September, the new Scottish Government's Skills Strategy asked the Partnership to 'move quickly to ensure that the SCQF embraces more learning opportunities by increasing the number of credit rating bodies, facilitating the inclusion of work-based learning programmes and encouraging the recognition of informal learning' (SG 2007, p. 49).

The SCQF published guidelines on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) as Volume 2 of its Handbook (SCQF 2007). Following the lead given by the Government's skills strategy (above), the SCQF Partnership commissioned a report on the state of play of RPL in Scotland. This concluded that capacity and infrastructure were limited on the supply side and a concerted marketing effort was required to stimulate demand (Inspire Scotland 2008). The Partnership has established an RPL Network and is working on tools to support its use.

The evaluation found that the process of becoming the national language of Scottish education was proceeding slowly (Gallacher et al. 2005). Knowledge of the framework varied considerably within and among the educational institutions and other organizations studied by the evaluation. Awareness and understanding tended to be greater among those who were directly involvement with the framework and its implementation and had a practical 'need to know' about it. Awareness and understanding of the SCQF were more limited among learners, employers and the general public; there was also limited awareness of the

framework in the school sector, where most qualifications provided were NQs awarded by the SQA and learners and teachers had less need to know about the wider SCQF.

Awareness and understanding have almost certainly increased since the 2005 evaluation. The SCQF is increasingly entering the language, mentioned in policy documents, used as the basis for collecting data and used as the currency for planning and reviewing provision. An important step in this process was the revision of the Scottish Qualifications Certificate, a cumulative record of each learner's SQA qualifications, to include SCQF levels and credit points.

Use and impact

The earlier study of the SCQF's introduction drew attention to two contrasting views of what constitutes its full implementation:

> In the narrower view, implementation is complete when (i) all qualifications are in place and (ii) the language of SCQF level and credit is used to describe all provision and all qualifications. Thereafter the role of the framework is an enabling one: it is expected to change behaviour but it is up to those who use it to determine how. This view of implementation is reflected in most official language about the Framework. In the broader view, it is the task of implementation to ensure that the Framework is used in particular ways, and in particular that SCQF credits are actually recognised for credit transfer. (Raffe 2003b, p. 250)

The evaluation made a similar distinction when it challenged the SCQF leadership to be clear about whether the framework was expected to be an agent of change, directly driving changes to the system, or an instrument of change for other 'drivers' to use (Gallacher et al. 2005). In practice, it concluded, the SCQF provided only an instrument of change. Several respondents felt it was a 'useful tool'; none felt that it had transformed Scottish education, although some still hoped that it would do so.

In this chapter, therefore, I distinguish between the implementation and use of the framework. Some of its uses are described below.

- Possibly most importantly, it provides a language and tool to support access, transfer and progression. However, in 2005 the evaluation found that this language and tool largely underpinned 'arrangements that would usually have been introduced in the absence of the SCQF' (Gallacher et al. 2005, p. 4) - although this partly reflects the fact that SCOTCAT was already providing a similar language on a less comprehensive basis before it was subsumed within the SCQF. Without some such language, the task of planning and implementing more flexible access transfer and progression arrangements would have been much harder. There has been further progress in the four years since the evaluation, reflected in numerous local initiatives and stimulated by complementary policy measures such as funding for 'regional hubs' to plan articulation arrangements among neighbouring HEIs and colleges. There is also growing interest in a wider range of types of transfer and progression, including transfer associated with the recognition of prior learning (RPL: see below) and articulation from degrees to HNDs as well as from HNDs to degrees (Knox and Whitaker 2009).

- The SCQF has been used in RPL. It has been used extensively in some occupational and professional areas such as the health service and banking, for example, to give exemption from qualification requirements. The recent review

of RPL found some examples of good practice but it was not consistently accessible or delivered across areas, industry sectors or sectors of education and training (Inspire Scotland 2008). Areas of development include apprenticeship, where RPL is seen to contribute to efficient delivery, community learning, the voluntary sector and careers work in schools (see below).

- Careers Scotland, the national all-age agency for careers information, advice and guidance, has used the SCQF to support its work. However, a survey of its staff in 2008 found that staff were aware of the framework and used it, but needed 'further guidance on how to use it effectively to assist with clients' career planning and development goals' (SCQF 2008, p. 6). A current pilot is exploring the use of RPL based on the SCQF to support guidance in schools.

- Institutions have used the framework for curriculum development, to support quality enhancement and to guide structural reforms, for example, as a tool for planning modularization and semesterization of HEI programmes. Such changes have rarely, if ever, been driven by the SCQF, although they have responded to the new demands created by the Bologna framework (which included the creation of a qualifications framework for higher education across Europe).

- Employers and professional bodies have used the framework for recruitment, to plan and organize their own training provision, to give recognition to their own qualifications and for RPL. So far, the total activity has been small; engagement with the SCQF, as distinct from particular sub-frameworks, tends to arise out of specific interests or needs. For example, the Scottish Police College uses the SCQF to organize and give recognition to its own provision; the Army is similarly interested in providing national recognition for its own training; the social services sector has used the framework to respond to increased qualification requirements for staff.

- Similar uses have been identified in less formal areas of learning, notably in youth and adult provision by voluntary organizations, community groups and local authorities. For example, the SCQF's newsletter recently described the use of the SCQF to design, and give recognition to, a programme for community activists (SCQF 2008).

- Finally, the SCQF provides a context in which further policy developments are taken forward. Since its introduction, the SQA has engaged in a review of its own portfolio of qualifications which led it to devise new group awards. In 2008, the Government consulted over plans for a new qualification to replace Standard Grade, to support a reform of the school and college curriculum for 3-18-year-olds (SG 2008). And the SCQF creates new opportunities for policy development. For example, the OECD's (2007) review of Scottish schooling proposed a flexible, unified graduation certificate that could be attempted by all post-16 learners, whether at school, college or in the workplace. The Government has rejected this proposal, but a carefully-designed group award based on the SCQF could potentially address many of the issues facing 16-18 education in Scotland.

It is relatively easy to list the uses of the SCQF, but much harder to quantify them. There are no system-wide data for this purpose. Reflecting its character as a communications framework, the SCQF has no central database of learners and data and monitoring functions remain with the sub-frameworks. The available data provide considerable scope for analyzing participation, achievement and progression within the SQA's portfolio of qualifications, and there are central data on higher education students (but with less information on progression). However, there are no national data sources that cover transfer and progression

between the SQA and higher education sub-frameworks or between these and other qualifications in the SCQF.

Assessing the SCQF's impact is similarly difficult, because it requires judgements of the counterfactual: how different would things have been in the absence of the SCQF? In the case of access, transfer and progression, the evaluation concluded that the SCQF had made little additional impact over and above the effects of the pre-existing sub-frameworks, although its impact has almost certainly increased since then. And as a comprehensive framework, the SCQF has considerably wider potential as a tool to support access, transfer and progression than a single sub-framework like the former SCOTCAT. Most of the uses of the SCQF listed above, such as career guidance, RPL and its uses in relation to employment and less formal learning, would be harder, if not impossible, to achieve without a comprehensive framework.

The SCQF is, as the evaluation concluded, a useful tool, and awareness and understanding of its potential applications are increasing. However, the actual use made of this tool has depended on other factors, including other government policy, institutional funding, and local and institutional initiatives, as well as the range of factors captured by the term 'institutional logics'.

United Kingdom and international aspects

All interviewees in the study described earlier 'agreed that there had been no international model for the SCQF; Scotland is out in front ...' (Raffe 2003b, p. 250). However, this does not mean that there has been no influence from elsewhere.

In the development of the SCQF, there were exchanges with other countries including South Africa and New Zealand (whose own framework had been influenced by the Action Plan), Northern Ireland and Wales. And although the SCQF level descriptors were based mainly in existing Scottish models, developed in the earlier reforms or other development work, they took account of recent experience in Namibia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland and South Africa (Hart 2008). International developments have influenced the pace and, at times, direction of change. The Bologna process was important both in maintaining momentum and in preserving the higher education part of the SCQF as a distinct sub-framework. International and UK developments sometimes slowed progress in Scotland: work on placing SVQs in the SCQF has been affected by the need to remain compatible with slower developments in NVQs in England. To some extent, uncertainty about the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) have had a similar effect.

Ireland and Scotland were the first countries to self-certify for the Bologna framework, and they are leading the process of referencing to the EQF. Scottish expertise has contributed to the development of these frameworks, as well as to other NQFs in Europe and beyond. Scotland has participated in other international activities such as the current OECD review of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Exchanges among the Irish and UK frameworks have resulted in a popular leaflet comparing these frameworks, and they have generated valuable experience in cross-referencing between frameworks (Hart 2009).

Notwithstanding its origins in an education-led partnership, the SCQF has a central role in the Scottish Government's strategy to achieve increased sustainable economic growth, and its skills strategy which aims to create cohesive and coherent structures for skills development and delivery, as well as to promote individual development and a stronger 'pull' from the economy. This strategy asked the SCQF Partnership to press ahead with implementing the framework by increasing the number of credit-rating bodies, including more work-based learning and encouraging RPL.

The SCQF Partnership's strategy has three broad objectives: to maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF; to promote and develop the framework as a tool to support lifelong learning; and to develop and maintain relationships with other frameworks in Europe, the United Kingdom, and internationally. It published a new Operational Plan earlier in 2009 (SCQF 2009). Current priorities include extending the framework by increasing the number of credit-rating bodies; updating the guidelines for a new Handbook, to be published later in 2009; employer engagement, through various targeted communications strategies; and engaging with current UK and international developments. These priorities will continue to depend on external circumstances. The recession has reduced the pace of employer engagement, because recruitment has fallen; and a reduction in migrant numbers may have implications in the future; a current scoping study is exploring support mechanisms for migrant workers and refugees.

5. Issues

At the beginning of this chapter, I distinguished between a celebratory account of the SCQF and a sceptical account. The celebratory account sees the SCQF as a successful framework, whose success reflects its character as a communications framework. The evidence in this chapter gives qualified support for this view. The SCQF has been reasonably successful. Its implementation is well advanced in the sense that it embraces nearly all mainstream qualifications and it is becoming established as part of the national language of education and training. It has some way to go before it covers all qualifications and assessed learning, although it is making faster progress than three years ago. It has been used for a variety of purposes, although much of its potential has still to be exploited and, consistent with its status as a communications framework, the full exploitation of this potential will depend on other policy and funding measures and on wider institutional and social factors beyond its immediate control. The SCQF is making slow progress, but it is making progress. And among other indicators of 'success', it retains the support of all sectors and interests in education and training as well as external stakeholders; it is widely seen as an achievement of the Scottish system and a strength to build on; and its potential uses and applications are increasingly recognized and understood.

And these achievements can be linked to its character as a communications framework: its loose design, its capacity to accommodate diversity, its incremental process of development and its voluntary character, reinforced by the leading role of educational providers and awarding bodies. These features have had negative, as well as positive, consequences: there have been tensions between different educational interests, the partnership model delayed progress and required action to strengthen its central leadership, and the uses and impacts

of the framework have been variable and often dependent on random initiatives from elsewhere.

However, if the evidence provides qualified support for the celebratory account, it has also provided support for at least the first two propositions of the sceptical account. These are, respectively, that the SCQF built very substantially on the series of reforms that preceded it, and that the model introduced by most of these reforms resembled a reforming framework more closely than a communications framework. Both propositions are supported by the evidence of section 3. The third proposition - that the SCQF *per se* added little to the impact of earlier reforms - is more doubtful. Although some uses of the SCQF (such as to support transfer and progression between colleges and universities) continue the functions of the pre-existing sub-frameworks, the character of the SCQF as a comprehensive framework has added a new dimension. The previous reforms greatly facilitated the *implementation* of the SCQF, but only when they were brought together within a single comprehensive framework did the current range of *uses* of the SCQF, whether potential or realized, become available. Indeed, this is what we would expect from the descriptions of types of frameworks and their purposes (see Figure 1). Many of the earlier reforms created sub-frameworks with specific objectives such as to fill gaps in provision; to update the content of learning; to rationalize provision; to promote new approaches to pedagogy and assessment; to enhance quality or to regulate occupational qualifications, in addition to promoting access transfer and progression. The SCQF's purposes were different: to create transparency and to provide a language that would make the system easier to understand, and thereby to promote access transfer and progression. In some respects, these were narrower purposes than those of the earlier frameworks. In other respects, they were more ambitious, as they relate to the whole education and training system. Such purposes could only have been achieved by bringing the sub-frameworks together into a comprehensive SCQF.

We cannot, therefore, accept the sceptical account in its entirety: the SCQF builds on the earlier frameworks, but it has different goals and it therefore adds to their achievements. However, we also have to recognize that the celebratory account, or that version which attributed success to the SCQF's character as a communications framework, is too simple. Indeed, the analysis points to the weakness of any cross-sectional comparative study which compares different types of NQF in order to compare their relative success, or the typical problems faced by each type. This is not because typologies are not valid (the discussion above suggests that the distinction between communications and reforming frameworks is valid and analytically helpful). Rather, it is because a country may belong to more than one type. The SCQF is a different type of framework from most of the frameworks which preceded it, and it is different from the sub-frameworks which sit within it. And we can only understand the way it works, its strengths and its weaknesses, in terms of the relationship between the (communications) SCQF and its (reforming) sub-frameworks, and the differences among these sub-frameworks.

These relationships have also to be understood in historical perspective. The SCQF may be a voluntary, partnership-based loosely-specified framework, but it came into existence as a result of compulsory, top-down and more tightly-specified reforms which laid the basis for it. A cross-sectional typology of NQFs needs, therefore, to be complemented by dynamic model(s) of the ways that NQFs develop and change over time. Drawing on the experience of the SCQF

and other frameworks, I have suggested that elements of such models might include:

- long time scales for development, implementation and impact;
- the participation and involvement of stakeholders;
- an incremental process of developing and implementing the framework;
- an iterative process of bringing the framework and practice into line with each other; and
- a shifting balance between the sub-framework development and framework-wide development. (Raffe 2009a, b)

It would be surprising if the characteristics of a framework - for example, its location on the continuum from communications to transformational - did not change over this process. For example, the SCQF suggests that as the 'shifting balance' moves from sub-frameworks to framework-wide development, the emphasis might shift from a reforming or transformational approach to a communications framework.

It would therefore be misleading to draw simple conclusions from the SCQF about the relative effectiveness of different types of frameworks. The more useful lessons from Scottish frameworks focus on the processes and issues that underlie such typologies, and they need to take account of variation within each country and changes over time. They draw on the earlier reforms as well as the SCQF itself.

One set of lessons concerns the design of an NQF. The Scottish experience points to a tension between the 'tightness' with which a framework is specified and its coverage or scope. SVQs and Higher Still had difficulty in covering their target range of provision, partly because of their relatively tight designs. A unifying or comprehensive framework needs to be loose. This lesson has been learnt by Scottish policy-makers; recent reforms have placed more emphasis on 'fitness for purpose' in the design of qualifications; the aim of an integrated framework is now perceived as to coordinate diversity rather than establish uniformity. But the Scottish experience shows that provided a framework is appropriately specified, it can accommodate diverse types of learning; the epistemological and other barriers to a unified framework can be overcome. And the Scottish experience suggests ways in which this can be achieved: by nesting tighter sub-frameworks within a loose comprehensive framework; by avoiding '... a "pure" outcomes model [which] assume[s] that outcomes can be wholly separate from institutional "inputs"' (Young and Allais 2009, p. 15); and by recognizing the critical importance of assessment arrangements for pedagogy, curriculum and the smooth administration of the system, and avoiding the over-complicated assessment models which are so easily generated during development.

A second set of lessons concerns implementation. The Scottish reforms illustrate the political character, in the broad sense, of qualifications frameworks. They potentially redistribute power and control between different central authorities (such as Scottish and UK authorities in the Action Plan), between central authorities and educational institutions (as in most government-led reforms), between different sectors of education such as schools and colleges (Higher Still) or colleges and universities (SCQF) and between mainstream education and more peripheral forms of learning. All NQFs face a tension

between the need for central coordination and direction and the need to engage stakeholders, especially educational providers and professionals. Some of the earlier Scottish reforms were perceived to err on the side of central direction, losing support among educators and producing unworkable proposals that were out of touch with practice. The SCQF erred on the side of stakeholder engagement; its partnership model slowed progress before it was re-launched with a stronger executive in 2006.

However, the issue is more than a simple choice between greater or lesser engagement of stakeholders. The implementation process is also shaped by the relative power of external stakeholders and education/training interests (which consistently dominated the Scottish reforms) and of different education/training interests ('academic' interests have been most powerful in Scotland). The Scottish experience illustrates a particular dynamic of comprehensive NQFs, in whose development sector-specific interests may be disenfranchised if they lack the perspective or capacity to engage with sector-wide issues. And it demonstrates how bodies set up to develop and administer a qualifications framework become stakeholders in their own right and typically have both the interest and the expertise to maintain the direction of movement. SCOTVEC and the SQA were examples; the SCQF Partnership with its small executive forms an interesting contrast.

Finally, the Scottish experience raises issues about the use and impact of NQFs, and about the limited capacity of qualifications on their own to achieve systemic change in education and training. As research on Higher Still concluded, "[a] reform of curriculum and qualifications cannot, on its own, radically transform the rules of positional competition, nor can it achieve full 'parity of esteem'" (Raffe et al. 2007, p. 505). The concept of 'institutional logic' - and the notion that it could be more powerful than the 'intrinsic logic' of a qualifications framework - was developed in research on the Action Plan and it has proved applicable to all subsequent reforms. Time and again research has shown how access to learning, progression and transfer, the relative standing of different tracks and programmes, the marketability of qualifications and so on all depend more on the logics of their surrounding institutions (broadly defined) than the structure of the qualifications framework. At least two important implications follow. The first is the importance of 'policy breadth'. An effective NQF needs to be accompanied by complementary measures to promote its use. This is particularly true of a communications framework, but it was also true of the reforming frameworks which preceded the SCQF. Second, expectations need to be realistic. Expectations about the SCQF have differed, and especially in its early years there was a danger that too much realism could undermine the enthusiasm and commitment of stakeholders. Throughout its existence, the management of expectations has been one of the main challenges for the SCQF.

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Chapter 3: The implementation and impact of the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework – Rob Strathdee

1. Introduction

This chapter outlines some of the major factors leading to the introduction of the New Zealand NQF. It also describes the NQF's design, outlines changes that were introduced following its introduction in 1991, and explores its impact to date.

The New Zealand case is potentially interesting, as the agency responsible for the implementation of the NQF, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), attempted to introduce a unified qualifications framework. The idea was that *all* forms of education and training that were funded by the State (and those that were not) would adopt a common system of measuring and recording learning. It was argued that this would create a seamless system of education and training. Accordingly, learners would be able to move with ease between different providers of education and training as they built their human capital. However, as described more fully throughout this chapter, a number of factors conspired against the NZQA as it attempted to implement its original vision, including resistance from universities and from other groups and individuals. It is also reasonable to assert that the NQF gained political traction for its more ambitious proposal during a period when New Zealand was undertaking widespread and rapid reform of many different aspects of public policy. Subsequent administrations, which had different objectives, were less supportive of the NZQA's original vision.

Assessing the impact of the NQF with precision is not always easy. In terms of the academic literature, much of what exists can be described as critical policy studies. This literature is primarily concerned with raising critical *questions* about the NQF, rather than providing firm empirical answers to important questions (e.g. Black 2001; Irwin et al. 1995; Jordan and Strathdee 2001; QCA 2005; Roberts 1997; Robson 1994; Sako 1999; Strathdee 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2006). However, as described in more detail below, there exists a growing number of empirical research papers that have been published on the impact of the NQF.

Structure of the chapter

Section 2 describes the New Zealand context. Section 3 devotes attention to describing the NZQA's vision for the reform. Section 4 then describes the implementation of the NQF, highlighting changes that have been introduced over time. Although it may have started out as a relatively simple reform, accommodations and modifications mean that the current NQF is very different to that envisaged in the 1980s.

2. New Zealand's social, political and economic context

New Zealand is a small country in the South Pacific. Its population is slightly over four million (the third lowest in the OECD) and it has the fourth smallest economy of the 30 OECD countries (larger only than Iceland, Luxembourg and the Slovak Republic). New Zealand's population is projected to grow from 4.06 million in 2004 to 4.73 million in 2026 and 5.05 million in 2051 (Statistics New Zealand 2005). The majority of New Zealanders are of European descent. However, a significant proportion of the population is Māori (New Zealand's indigenous people) and Pasifika (immigrants from the Pacific Islands). The proportion of the population that is of Māori and Pasifika descent is likely to increase, leading to even greater ethnic diversity in New Zealand; the European sector of the population is therefore predicted to fall from 79 per cent in 2001 to 70 per cent in 2021.

The dominant language in New Zealand is English, but in recent years there has been a concerted effort to increase the number of speakers of *te reo Māori*. There is a vibrant network of schools where the main language of instruction is te reo Māori, and a bilingual television station has been launched.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its small size, New Zealand operates under a unicameral political system and this has meant that the Government has been able to make changes with ease. However, the introduction of a system of proportional representation has served to limit the ability of governments to act without consultation with other political parties.

The political landscape is dominated by two main parties: the National Party and the Labour Party. The National Party can be compared to the Conservative Party in England. Like the Conservative Party, the National Party has continued to support neo-liberal and neo-conservative values (that is, committed to creating a small strong State that supports free markets). However, the recently-elected National Government shows signs of adopting a more centrist position. By contrast, the Labour Party, which apart from a period when it was captured by the New Right (see below for further detail), has remained social democratic in orientation. As noted above, the introduction of proportional representation has increased the power of minor parties to influence decision making through forming coalition governments. The following table is designed to aid readers' understanding of the position of different governments towards the NQF. (Note: This table needs to be read in conjunction with the material that follows.)

Table 1.   Governments of New Zealand and the NQF

Period	Name	Orientation	Contribution to the NQF
1984 - 1990	Labour Governments	Neo-liberal/Neo-Conservative	Enacted legislation to establish original vision of NQF. Created markets in education and training by allowing private providers of training greater access to State funds.
1990 - 1999	National Governments	Neo-liberal/Neo-Conservative	Pushed ahead with the creation markets in education and training. Would not force all providers to adopt original vision of NQF. Believed that traditional examination system should be preserved. As a result: • old examination systems remained and operated along NQF (e.g., the School Certificate and University Entrance examinations) • universities remained separate from NQF
1999 - 2008	Labour-led Governments	Modern Social Democratic	Introduced 'broadened' NQF. As a result: • new qualification for senior school students introduced (National Certificate of Educational Achievement, which is offered at levels 1 to 3 of the NQF) • introduced Scholarship qualification for brightest secondary school students (offered at level 4) • achievement standards introduced in 'academic areas' of school • created register of quality assured qualifications – ALL qualifications that receive State funding must be registered. However, registration falls well short of the vision of the NQF. Argued market-led training system had failed, but supportive of NQF. Moved to 'investment approach' in which Government purchased training outcomes rather than allowed 'market forces' to determine outcomes.
2008	National-led Administration	Pragmatic, but supportive of free enterprise	Unclear, but unlikely to change NQF. Most change will be to curb costs by reducing provision of sub-degree training (for example, this which occurs at sub-degree level in Adult and Community Education). Signaled a move away from the previous administration's 'investment approach'.

Because New Zealand is a small, isolated country with a low population density, it is heavily dependent for its economic progress on exports. During the 1960s and early 1970s, high export prices for agricultural produce delivered to New Zealanders a relatively high standard of living. At the time, it was generally possible for young people to leave school at the earliest possible moment and gain relatively good jobs. However, from the mid-1970s, returns from agriculture declined (though the recent boom in dairy prices is a notable exception to this trend). As a result, from the late 1970s New Zealand's unemployment rate, or the number of unemployed

persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force, increased peaking at 11 per cent in 1992. As is usually the case, unemployment was particularly high amongst those most vulnerable, i.e., youth and ethnic minorities. In the early 1980s, New Zealand had an unemployment rate of about 17 per cent for young people aged between 15 and 19 years. More recently, high economic growth (and other changes in social welfare) led to full employment and skill shortages (though unemployment is currently on the rise once more).[38]

Over time, the areas of the labour market in which New Zealanders work have changed. Perhaps the most important change is the increase in the size of the service sector. In the past, the majority of New Zealanders worked in industries related to agriculture. While, agriculture remains important, new sectors have assumed increased importance (for example, finance, tourism, health services, and other service sector occupations).

In an attempt to help individuals meet the demands for new forms of skill, successive governments have invested in skill development and learning (of which the NQF is an important component). However, while successive governments have each been committed to skill development, they differ in how they believe the NQF can contribute to this. For neo-liberal interests, the value of the NQF is that it created a market in education and training in which the voice of employers was increased. For example, through various mechanisms, the skills required by employers are, in theory, better identified (Strathdee 2003).

The bulk of accredited learning occurs in New Zealand's compulsory schooling sector (schooling is compulsory and free between the ages of 5 and 16 years, although the Minister of Education has the power to allow students to leave school earlier than this), and in New Zealand's major providers of tertiary education. In 2007, about 5 per cent (2,834) of students left the compulsory school sector with few or no qualifications (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2007a), and 1,930 students left with early exemptions (ibid. 2007b). Exemptions are usually only granted where there is evidence that the young person is moving on to other accredited training, for example, an apprenticeship.

The performance of New Zealanders academically remains high compared to other OECD nations. However, there continues to be concern about the achievement of some groups in society. For example, like many other western nations, the Government of New Zealand is concerned about the low levels of literacy skills held by individuals in school and in the workforce. Also, at a post-school level, New Zealand performed poorly compared to other OECD nations. For example, results of the 1997 International Adult Literacy Survey (ibid. 1999) showed that only about 20 per cent of New Zealanders were operating at a highly-effective level of literacy and able to manage abstract concepts and employ specialized knowledge in interpreting information. However, as international experience has shown, lower levels of literacy were found to be concentrated with ethnic minority

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[38] All figures produced by Statistics New Zealand http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/table-builder/table-builder-labour-market.htm [10 June 2009].

groups and the unemployed. To help reverse this, the Government introduced the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy.[39]

When considering these comments, it is important to remember that New Zealand has produced some of the highest literacy rates for OECD nations. For example, New Zealand 15 year-old students performed very strongly in reading literacy in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2000 assessment (Sturrock and May 2002).

3.   The original vision for the NQF

As was the case in many other nations, the NQF has its immediate origins in the political and economic crisis that was manifest in the rise of neo-liberalism as an approach to political and economic management in the 1980s. In the 1980s and 1990s in New Zealand (and earlier in other nations), there was significant economic restructuring and moves towards a less-regulated economy. These moves were designed to improve efficiency and promote enterprise.

Although it is not widely understood, the introduction of the NQF was an important part of a broader neo-liberal policy response to New Zealand's economic problems of the 1980s. This response found expression in a series of reports that identified a need to improve competitiveness in global markets; a need to reduce educational inequality; a need to create a modern education system that would encourage lifelong learning; and a need to increase skill levels in the labour force. As part of the overall strategy, it was argued that all forms of knowledge were of equal value and that distinctions between academic and vocational knowledge reflected outdated class-based prejudices. Indeed, it was argued that markets are best placed to determine the value of knowledge. If the nature of the labour market has changed, then, according to social democrats, what is taught in New Zealand's educational institutions and how this learning is assessed should also change (Strathdee 2005b).

The NQF was designed to achieve this change. Thus, the NQF was deemed necessary to increase participation, create a lifelong learning culture, increase overall levels of achievement, and align the status of vocational and academic learning (NZQA 1991). In effect, where previously educational policy intervention was designed to push learners out of education and training and into work as quickly as possible, proponents of the NQF claimed that obtaining and retaining a place in the post-Fordist economy (or high wage/high skill economy) required that learners remain in education and training for longer periods to learn different skills.

However, improving the integrative function of education also required that assessment practices change from merely ranking learners against one another to telling employers what students can actually do. As former Director-General of Education, Bill Renwick stated in relation to secondary school education in New Zealand:

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[39] See http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/litnum_stra_e.php   [10 June 2009].

The function of education of sorting and grading is much less central to the educational responsibilities of teachers than it was a generation ago. Public education is now looked upon less as a scarce commodity to be rationed and more as a service which all members of the public will need to make use of in various ways at different points in their lives and for many reasons. ... If the renewed interest in education for working life has done one thing it has directed attention to the inadequacies of School Certificate and University Entrance result cards as providers of useful information about potential employees. Employers now want to know more about a prospective employee than the examination result card can tell them. (Renwick 1981, p. 10)

Poor information flows are also believed to have contributed to credential inflation, particularly during periods of high unemployment. This has occurred because credentials have tended to serve as simple selection devices rather than indicating exactly what skills potential recruits have obtained. In addition, the NZQA argued that the lack of useful information reduced the level of trust employers had in educational qualifications. One result is that employers demanded credentials far beyond those that were necessary for particular jobs in the hope that recruits would have the actual skills they want (Strathdee, 2005b). To improve the provision of information, the NZQA proposed providing all learners with an individual record of their learning, which would show clearly what learners had achieved and could do.

Finally, as the argument of the day went, students who did not perform well in one-off, norm-referenced examinations were seen to be locked into assessment systems which promoted their failure. This contributed to educational inequality of opportunity:

> ... when secondary education became the right of all children in New Zealand the present system was seen as a means of ensuring equality of opportunity, irrespective of background. The system was meant to be fair to all. It was argued that any child born with ability would succeed. Unfortunately, experience has shown children do not have equal opportunity. Race, class, and income are more likely to determine success than innate ability. The emphasis on written examinations has ... meant that ability has been recognised only within a narrow range of intellectual skills. Practical and creative skills, for example, go unrecognised in such a system. (Hood 1986)

The unstated assumption with the then assessment system – norm-referenced assessment – according to NZQA's former Policy and Development Manager, Alan Barker (Barker 1995), is that only some people can learn. In order to adequately prepare all learners for the demands of the post-industrial economy, and maintain economic competitiveness in the face of increased globalization of the world economy, it is thought to be vital that all learners, regardless of their social-class, race or gender, learn new skills and develop a love for lifelong learning.

However, it is not only new forms of assessing and recording learning which were required to meet the challenges posed by the 'new' economy; new forms of curriculum were also required. Here the claim was that the curriculum had not kept pace with changing demands in the labour market. One reason for the mismatch between the skills demanded by employers and those provided by schools was that traditional approaches to curriculum development evolved from social democratic models which involved a wide range of groups – employers, teachers, state officials and others who all had an interest in such matters – collectively deciding what constituted valuable knowledge (Jesson 1995). However, rapid and recent technological change had rendered this method

impotent as it limited the ability of educational systems to respond quickly to technological change.

According to David Hood (1986), who went on to head the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the answer to these and other goals lay in State intervention designed to extend internal assessment and increase the involvement of employers in curriculum development. At the time there existed the political will in New Zealand to work towards these ends, and in 1987, a Board of Studies was established by the then Labour Government and relevant legislation was enacted to enable the Board to extend internal assessment to other areas of the schooling system. This allowed policy-makers to begin consultation with interested parties and to begin formulating the required changes.

However, the political circumstances were changing. Although Labour was re-elected in 1987 (having been elected to office in the 1984 election), by this stage the administration of education was dramatically different and consultation came to be seen as a way of deferring important decisions. Indeed, interested groups such as teachers were increasingly considered to have "captured" policy-making. As a result, the Board was seen to serve the interests of those on it. Similarly, the view that the debate over assessment should be expanded to include the tertiary sector emerged and this required a broader focus. The Board of Studies was abolished soon after it was established (Selwood 1991).

It is important to note at this juncture that unsurprisingly, given its small size, New Zealand operates under a unicameral political system. Up until 1996, election to office was determined using a 'first past the post' system. This increased political stability because political parties were able to establish with ease majorities in the House of Representatives. This helps explain why New Zealand governments have been able to advance reforms that are radical. For example, it is widely acknowledged that New Zealand's version of neo-liberalism went much further than such movements elsewhere. Although it remains a question for further empirical investigation, arguably the same factor lies behind the attempt to introduce a unitary framework. In the absence of effective systems of political opposition, governments in New Zealand were able to make decisions without compromise (Palmer 1979). In response to the perceived misuse of power (particularly that which led to the introduction of the New Zealand experiment (or New Zealand's radical application of neo-liberalism) (Kelsey 1997), in 1996, a system of proportional representation was introduced. As a result, most governments now rule in coalition with minor parties and it is more difficult for administrations to act with impunity.

The NQF was set up by the Labour Government under Section 253 of the July 1990 Education Amendment Act, and, as noted, its origins are in a series of educational reviews and reports which date well back into the 1970s. The most influential of these was the *Report of the Working Group on Post Compulsory Education and Training* (Hawke 1988). In his report to the Cabinet Social Equity Committee, the convenor, Gary Hawke, stated that, "New Zealand's post compulsory education and training system, like other parts of our society, could contribute more to both economic efficiency and social equity". (ibid., p. 6)

This chapter recommended the establishment of a centralized educational authority designed to bring together a range of distinct educational bodies. The report also suggested the creation of a seamless education system. The key recommendations in relation to the NQF were:

- that PCET (Post Compulsory Education and Training) should be reformed in line with improvements in the public sector finance management such as greater provider accountability and greater user pays.

- that a system of national qualifications be established with an across the portfolio approach to qualifications which would help to reduce barriers to access and movement between institutions (idem).

The *Report of the Working Group on Post Compulsory Education and Training* (1988) provided the basis for the publication of *Learning for life* (New Zealand Office of the Minister of Education 1989). *Learning for life* was a statement of the Government's intent in the area of post-compulsory education. After a number of working groups had discussed and responded to *Learning for life*, the Government released some of its policy decisions regarding reform of post-compulsory education. These were reported in *Learning for life: Two* (ibid. 1990). Essentially, the education system was seen to be too fragmented and inefficient. Reflecting the language of neo-liberalism, which dominated policy directives at the time, one reason offered is that the system was seen to be governed by rules and regulations that confused and frustrated consumers. According to official accounts, this meant that the system was vulnerable to pressure group politics and created few incentives for educational institutions to manage their resources efficiently. It was also seen to lead to institutions being slow to respond to changing demand within the labour market for workers with particular skills.

To improve participation and achievement, the Government wanted to make education more accessible. This, it suggested, could be achieved by reducing the selective function of education. At the same time, the Government signalled that there were important reasons why it should continue to fund post-school education, but that there was also a need to develop a broader base of funding. In other words, learners were required to make a greater contribution to the cost of their education.

The desire to achieve these aims provided the context for the development of the NZQA. It was assigned the function of interpreting and implementing the original legislation. One of its principal functions was to develop a framework for national qualifications in secondary schools and in post-school education and training in which:

> All qualifications (including pre-vocational courses provided under the Access Training Scheme) have a purpose and a relationship to each other that students and the public can understand; and there is a flexible system for the gaining of qualifications with recognition of competency already achieved. (Government of New Zealand 1995, p. 242)

As noted, in contrast to the approach adopted by other nations, in the original vision the NQF was designed to replace *all* existing qualifications with a series of new certificates, diplomas, and degrees, registered at various levels on a unified qualifications framework. In order to meet these goals, the NZQA decided to overhaul assessment practices by developing standards-based assessment as a replacement for all other forms of assessment. A major feature of standards-based assessment is that responsibility for assessing learning outcomes is devolved away from central bodies over to teachers and others who must assess whether or not learners have met predetermined levels of achievement. In the past, norm-referenced national examinations were established and administered by central bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Vice

Chancellors' Committee. However, under the NQF, as initially conceived and developed, the NZQA was to oversee all assessment practices. This included accrediting providers, registering all qualifications on one framework and ensuring that systems of moderation (to ensure consistency in assessor judgements) were in place and were effective.

The NQF was designed to promote the development of a modular curriculum based on units of learning (unit standards). To create these units, the NQZA established a number of bodies to set standards in all areas of learning. These were known as National Standard Bodies (NSBs) (and included Industry Training Organisations (ITOs)).

Unit standards are perceived as a collection of predetermined, clearly-defined learning outcomes. They are established at a particular level of the NQF and are published by the NZQA. They are a measure of learning that allow combinations to assist in the creation of diverse qualifications.

Closely related to the NQF was the Industry Training Strategy, introduced in 1992. It aimed to lift the quantity and quality of workplace learning. The Strategy provided the process for industry to control the development, implementation and management of industry training programmes, including the setting of skill standards (which are registered on the NQF and set by ITOs).

Most of the training overseen by ITOs is at levels 1 to 4 of the NQF. ITOs do not necessarily provide training themselves, but make arrangements for workplace assessment and off-job delivery of training, such as purchase of training at an institute of technology or polytechnic or private training establishment (and they set the standards of achievement required to gain unit standards and, ultimately, whole qualifications).

It was intended that ITOs would represent directly the needs and wishes of the employers for whom they act. Thus, the aim was that the development of learning outcomes (and the related standards of achievement) would be driven by those who use the skills produced by the New Zealand industry training system – namely, employers. Once learning outcomes are registered, any provider who has been quality assured, can offer training in the area. Thus, through specifying standards, ITOs have the ability to help drive the development of national curricula.

ITOs and other National Standards Bodies (NSBs) were also given responsibility for developing complete qualifications, while the providers of qualifications – the schools, polytechnics and other educational institutions (and tutors working in workplaces) – had ownership of the delivery or teaching methods. Unit standards were designed so that they varied in size depending on the amount of work needed to complete them and they were subsequently placed on the NQF at varying levels depending on their difficulty. There were eight levels of learning on the original NQF:

- National Certificates are awarded at levels 1 to 4;

- National Diplomas are awarded at levels 5 and 6;

- Undergraduate degrees are awarded at level 7;

- Other degrees and higher certificates are awarded at level 8.

While theoretically there is no minimum standard for level 1 unit standards, these are thought to equate to an average ability Year 11 student (about 15 years old).

The original vision promoted the view of a seamless education system with students gaining qualifications from a variety of providers. For secondary school students, enacting this vision to its fullest implied that schools would lose their custodial function. In addition to the national certificates designed by industry, it was envisaged that school students would study towards national certificates of educational achievement (although the precise details were not provided).

As will be outlined in more detail and critically evaluated below, the official view of New Zealand's NQF was that it *would* achieve the following aims:

- to create a single, coordinated framework of qualifications;
- to provide a consistent basis for the recognition of educational achievement wherever that achievement occurs;
- to extend recognition to a wide range of achievements;
- to encourage the integration of 'academic skills' with applied skills, and to bring together theory and practice;
- to enable and encourage diversity among providers of education and training, and to recognize academic freedom;
- to reform assessment practices in education and training;
- to raise progressively the standards of educational achievement;
- to shift the practice of teaching to student-centred learning;
- to provide quality assurance for qualifications;
- to enable qualifications to evolve and develop;
- to recognize the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi;
- to provide a rational system of nomenclature for qualifications;
- to provide a system of credit accumulation and transfer;
- to enable qualifications that are flexible;
- to encourage a wider range of educational settings; and
- to provide incentives to increase individual and collective investment in education and training. (NZQA 1996)

Even accounting for the fact that this is the official view, it is an impressive list of promises. At the time, the NZQA had adopted an activist approach in which it was trying to revolutionize New Zealand's education and training sector. And, as noted, it was introduced during a period when the dominant view in Government was that policy changes in all areas needed to be made swiftly – something that was possible under New Zealand's system of government of the day.

One of the difficulties was that many of these aims remained visions, which were primarily used to 'sell' the NQF to the community. Many were not buttressed by concrete strategies, or funding needed to realize them. Also the election of a National administration (i.e., conservative) in 1990 indicated that the

political terrain was changing. As detailed in the next section, this led to a number of problems for the NZQA.

Implementing the NQF

The NQF was launched in 1991. However, it did not take long before it ran into difficulty. Looking first at vocational areas – progress was made in some areas (but not all) in developing unit standards and creating new qualifications. In *some* areas NQF qualifications were taking hold; however, in many others they struggled to win the hearts and minds of users. Based on NQF figures, the Industry Training Federation (ITF) (2006) reported this growth in the numbers of registered trainees (from 81,343 in 2001 to 161,676 in 2005) as confirmation of industry training achievements. In other evidence, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) records that industry training had grown substantially from 16,711 trainees in 1992 to 176,064 in 2006 (TEC 2006). In part, this increase reflected the impact of new interventions such as the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme. This was introduced in 2002 by a Labour Government, which had reinvented itself as a modern social democratic administration, partly in response to concerns that the Industry Training Strategy itself was not having the desired impact. It is also possible that it took longer than expected for the market-led industry training system to yield its full effect. However, as was the case in the United Kingdom, despite being 'employer-led' there was little solid evidence early on that employers as a group were embracing the new training arrangements (and, hence, the need for the new Investment Approach, which is described below). For example, one report argued that employers appeared to be 'ambivalent' about the NQF in general, and ITOs in particular (Long et al. 2000). At the time, less than 10 per cent of young people aged 15 to 19 years received training linked to the NQF (hence, the introduction of the modern apprenticeship scheme). In contrast, 35 per cent of those aged 50 years and over received training. The amount of training varied markedly across different industries in New Zealand. Although the figures are dated, approximately 30 per cent of trainees were in the Building Services and Contractors ITOs whilst other industries were not represented at all (New Zealand Office of the Prime Minister 2002). In addition, despite being employer-led, 45 per cent of all employees in New Zealand were not covered by an ITO. Explanations for reluctance of employers to adopt the Industry Training Strategy include a belief that the ITO model did not meet the employer/occupational group needs. In addition, it was argued that the qualifications and necessary entry requirements had already been established through other means – for example via the university system. Finally, there continues to be a reluctance on the part of industry to be involved in training that may lead employees to demand increased remuneration (Strathdee 2005b).

Although the numbers of trainees engaged in training linked to the NQF continues to increase, the patterns set early have remained with coverage uneven. This means that some qualifications remain underutilized. Indeed, some Industry Training Organizations have relatively large numbers of trainees (for example, Competenz, New Zealand Engineering, Food and Manufacturing ITOs), while others have relatively few (for example, New Zealand Enquine ITOs), and others (for example, the ITO that supported the banking sector), have fallen over for want of support.

The poor uptake of the NQF in some areas raises questions about the validity of the post-Fordist thesis. Briefly, the post-Fordist posits work as

becoming increasingly skilled and hence individuals need more training. However, it is far from clear that this theory holds for all areas of the labour market. For example, as argued in more detail elsewhere (Strathdee 2003), many areas of the labour market do not require workers to have high levels of skill and expertise, and in a few areas skill is only a small part of a firm's competitive strategy. Initially at least, the NZQA tended to argue that although post-Fordism has yet to make an impact on some areas, competing in global economic ways that created high wage/high skill employment means that New Zealand will eventually need to modernize its labour force or it will face ever-declining incomes. More recently, the NZQA has had less to say about the possibilities for the NQF in these terms and has set about servicing the scheme that currently exists. The point is important because it goes to the heart of employers' motivations to invest in upskilling. If their competitive strategies do not encompass a need to increase skill levels, it is unlikely that they will embrace the opportunities created by the NQF. Indeed, as described more fully below, in many areas of the labour market employers do not see a need to embrace the opportunities and, despite making just such a promise at one point, the Government did not force them to.

While questions remain about the impact of the NQF on employers, it is clear that, by increasing the number of providers that can offer accredited learning, the NQF has had an impact on New Zealand's education and training sector. The NQF has helped create markets in education and training, particularly through providing a means by which competing providers can offer accredited training.

First, the NZQA accreditation processes have allowed numerous new providers to offer accredited (and State subsidized) training. As a result, a training market emerged with new training providers competing with traditional providers for students (however, as described below, recent developments in policy have curtailed this). The main driver here was the availability of significant State funding to private providers of education. Prior to the reforms, New Zealand had a good number of private training providers. These went from offering second chance training under contract to the State, to becoming fully-fledged training providers that recruited their own students and offered courses they thought would be of interest to students just like any other provider of training.

Second, the NQF aimed to increase the involvement of the employers in deciding what constitutes valuable knowledge and, as is the case wherever NQFs have been introduced (Young and Allais 2009), to provide them with information that they can trust. As part of this process, NQFs aspire to reduce 'reputational effects' in education which see employers (and other groups) favouring graduates from elite institutions because they are perceived to have good reputations (Strathdee 2009b). While attempting to create open competitions for advancement is clearly a worthwhile ambition, unfortunately, there is little evidence that employers as a group trust NQF qualifications more than previous qualifications, or if 'traditional' recruitment methods (for example, through social networks) provide a more reliable and trustworthy source of information about new recruits. If this reasoning is accurate, then it suggests a nuanced approach to understanding the connection between trust and the implementation of outcomes-based systems of assessment is required (Young and Allais 2009).

Third, increasing the involvement of employers in decisions about what constitutes valuable knowledge was designed to address concerns about the

relevancy of knowledge produced and taught by New Zealand's training system. The attempt to increase employer voice (Hirschman 1970) is most apparent in the system of ITOs. The creation of ITOs has helped to ease concerns expressed by neo-liberal interests about the inefficiencies in the provision of economically-relevant qualifications. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether or not users of qualifications (for example, employers, other providers and students) use NQF qualifications in the manner desired by policy-makers.

Recent work suggests that the relationship between employment, qualifications, and the labour market is likely to be mitigated by field effects (Strathdee 2009b). In some fields, NQF qualifications are likely to signal capacities employers are interested in and to provide trustworthy information. In such instances, employers are likely to value NQF qualifications. In other fields, the rules are likely to differ. For their part, universities have used the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) as a basis for selection into tertiary education. This has meant that the qualification has status with schools. However, changes in government policy (described below) mean that the NCEA is now less useful and new ways of limiting participation are being sought, for example, by converting NCEA results to grade point averages (Strathdee 2009a).

Fourth, the Framework has contributed to the creation of an educational market by providing a common qualification currency in those sectors that have adopted the unit standard format. This common currency, like money in an economy, facilitates greater competition between the providers of educational qualifications because many institutions are recognizing and rewarding learning in the same way. This enhances the creation of markets in education and training through promoting exit (Strathdee 2003). Thus, the creation of a common educational currency increases consumer choice and, as the official argument proceeds, creates new pathways in education and training, and on to the labour market. In theory, this meant that students could choose between different providers offering the same programme, and therefore choose those they saw as the best.

However, resistance from a range of groups continued to limit the impact of the NQF in other areas. Critically, the NZQA could not convince the universities to adopt the unit standard model and the then Government would not force them to. Specifically, in 1994, following the release of a report critical of the NQF (New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee 1994), the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee withdrew the university sector from the NQF. The universities were concerned that standards-based assessment would be demotivating for students; that they could not adequately identify 'excellence' (which is the essence of university education); and that they did not adequately reflect that kind of teaching and learning that occurred in universities. Fears were also expressed at the time of their development that their introduction would lead to a fragmentation of knowledge and learning, and that advanced university qualifications could not simply be broken down into small unit standards.

However, it was not just the universities that had problems with the adoption of New Zealand's radical new framework. At the time of the NQF's launch, the political terrain had shifted once more, and the then national administration was in favour of selective assessment (that is, norm-referenced assessment) and was elected, in part, on a standards agenda in education. The irony here is of course that the NQF was also legitimated on the basis that it would increase standards in education (indicating the flexibility of the term in political discourses). The NQF was controversial and was seen as reducing

standards in education. For example, concern was expressed by conservative schools (which were keen to preserve their status and which threatened to use international examinations instead of the NQF); aspirational parents (who were probably worried about the advancement of their own children), and other groups. Like the universities, these individuals and groups were fearful that the proposed changes would reduce student motivation to achieve and would close off opportunities for social mobility. In addition, although there is a paucity of empirical evidence, it is reasonable to assert that despite the efforts of the NZQA, in general parents and their children did not really understand the measure (Strathdee and Hughes 2001). At the time a system of dual assessment had emerged with students in some subjects having their learning assessed through norm-referenced assessment and others through standards-based assessment. And, in some instances, students were being graded by both norm-referenced assessment and standards-based assessment. As a result, teacher workloads increased dramatically as they tried to implement a new system as well as maintain the existing one (idem). In addition, there was little movement of learners between schools and other providers, e.g. polytechnics. In part, this possibly reflects difficulties in splitting the funding between different providers. Whatever the reason, in practice, most students remained in school at least until they reached the then minimum leaving age of 15 years and there was little, if any, movement between different providers.

Problems also existed within Government, which further hampered the introduction of the NQF. Critically, the Ministry of Education had concerns about the applicability of unit standards to some school subjects. The specific concern was that assessment against unit standards was inappropriate for traditional school subjects. This was problematic for the NZQA because the Ministry had responsibility for developing school-level curriculum. Without its support, the NZQA could not progress its reform in 'conventional school subjects' in the compulsory school sector. Unit standards were implemented in some areas of the school curriculum.

The policy context that developed following the withdrawal of the universities from the NQF is complex (and requires further research). Nevertheless, it is clear that by the mid-1990s, a stalemate had developed between various agencies involved in the implementation of the NQF. As a result, progress implementing the NQF was limited, as the National Government failed to act. In 1999, the Government changed back to Labour. To its credit, Labour confronted the problem facing the NQF. Its solution to the stalemate was to release a White Paper in 1999, which signalled the development of a broadened NQF. The details of this shift are complex. However, as described in more detail below, arguably the changes reflected a victory for conservative interests because they effectively ensured that traditional pathways were maintained and the universities could continue to operate as they had traditionally done. As a result of the White Paper, the NZQA was forced to develop an NQF that was 'inclusive', but which did not force the universities to adopt the unit standard model. The actual strategy adopted to broaden the NQF was to create a register of quality assured qualifications ('the Register'). The Register, launched in 2001, provides the structure which brings together all approved qualifications available in New Zealand tertiary institutions (universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics, *wānanga* and private training establishments) and secondary schools. In other words, although university qualifications are on the Register of quality-assured qualifications, the universities were able to continue to set their own curricula and to assess learning outcomes in traditional ways. In turn, this helped preserve their status as

the elite, even though other providers were able to gain accreditation to offer degrees.

All approved qualifications must be described in terms of course objectives and learning profiles and they are registered on the Framework. However, they are not necessarily defined by NQF standards (see below). In addition, the NZQA has delegated the universities (and other providers) responsibility to assure the quality of their own qualifications; this task being undertaken by a sub-committee of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, the Committee on University Academic Programmes.[40]

It is worth pausing at this juncture to reiterate the following points.

1. All qualifications on the Register have been approved by a recognized body (for example, an Industry Training Organization (ITO), or the New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee) and are delivered by an accredited education or training organization (for example, a university).

2. Qualifications that recognize learning through achievement standards and unit standards are a subset of the qualifications registered.

3. All qualifications must be described in terms of course objectives and learning profiles.

4. Responsibility to quality assure qualifications has been vested in other agencies such as the New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee.

Returning to the reform process, at a school-level, the White Paper signalled the advancement of the long-awaited National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), to replace existing school qualifications. An important aspect of the change is that, under the NCEA, the way in which learning can be assessed against standards in conventional school subject areas has been broadened. In the case of approved curriculum-related school subjects, learning is assessed against predetermined standards in one of three ways.

1. First, a new measure known as achievement standards has been developed by panels of subject experts (that is, Standards Setting Bodies, which in the case of conventional school subjects appear to be appointed by the Ministry of Education). Achievement standards are similar to unit standards in that they clearly specify the standards students are required to obtain in each subject area in order to receive credit towards the NCEA. However, unlike unit standards, they have been designed so that satisfactory work, good work, and excellent work can be recognized with 'credit', 'merit', and 'excellence' grades. The inclusion of graded assessments has gone some way to appease the concerns of those who felt that the original pass/fail system of assessment would be demotivating for students.

School students typically aim to achieve NCEA level 1 in Year 11 (when they are aged about 14), NCEA level 2 in Year 12 (when they are aged about

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[40] http://www.nzvcc.ac.nz/aboutus/sc/cuap [10 June 2009].

15), and NCEA level 3 in Year 13 (when they are aged about 16). Another new qualification, the national diploma, was placed at levels 5 to 7; initial degrees at level 7; and advanced degrees at level 8. The eighth level originally covered all postgraduate qualifications, including those developed by universities. In response to concerns that the top levels of the NQF did not recognize advanced post-graduate levels of learning, an additional two levels were added to the NQF. In addition, a new award, known as Scholarship (at level 4 of the NQF) has been introduced at the senior secondary school level to recognize the achievement of the very brightest.

2. Second, assessment against unit standards continues, where appropriate, and credit will continue to be awarded on a 'has reached standard/has yet to reach standard' basis.
3. Third, other examinations or qualifications can be used to obtain credits. In an attempt to ensure the new qualifications have rigour, the Government has insisted that external examinations be used to determine at least 60 per cent of the final grade in most conventional subject areas.

It remains a 'credit' model, but made up of a complex mix of achievement standards and unit standards.

National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) levels

Level 1
- Required: 80 or more credits at level 1 or higher, you have gained NCEA level 1. Eight of these credits must be from numeracy standards and eight credits from literacy standards. Literacy can be assessed in English or in *te reo Māori*.

Level 2
- Required: 60 or more credits at level 2 or above and 20 credits at any other level. Credits can be used for more than one qualification; so some of your NCEA level 1 credits can count towards NCEA level 2. At level 2 there are no specific literacy or numeracy requirements.

Level 3
- Required: 80 credits or more, of which 60 must be at level 3 or above and 20 at level 2 or above.

Rewarding achievement
- Students can now gain NCEA certificates with merit or excellence. To gain excellence, 50 or more of the required 80 credits must be awarded at excellence level. If 50 or more credits are gained at merit level (or a mix of merit and excellence), an NCEA with merit will be awarded.

As noted, there were concerns about the impact that modularization of the curriculum would have on the quality of education senior secondary students would receive. However, recent studies have shown that the predictive validity of the NCEA on subsequent performance in higher education is high in mathematics (James et al. 2008) and overall (Shulruf et al. 2008). However, as Shulruf et al. (2008) noted, recent research had shown that students have emphasized the accumulation of credits (Mayer et al. 2006). As they point out, if NCEA candidates aspire to succeed at university, it may be appropriate to shift this emphasis from minimum passes in more credits to higher achievement in fewer credits.

Overall, there is little evidence that assessment against standards is any more motivating for students than the old system, or that students who have performed poorly in traditional forms of assessment are doing better under the new. Of course, to have their full effect, it is necessary for the new qualifications both to be more motivating and for employers to trust them as signals of competency. Unfortunately, for proponents of the NQF, there is little evidence that either have occurred. Similarly, proponents of the NQF hoped to create parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. Small-scale research has shown that students value most university qualifications (and those qualifications they need to gain entrance to university) (Strathdee and Hughes 2001), but it remains unclear how they have been received by employers. However, credential inflation and the tendency for larger cohorts of students to progress to higher levels of education and training means that this issue is of declining importance.

There is also evidence that completion rates in some areas of New Zealand's tertiary education system remain lower than desirable, suggesting that the NQF has yet to achieve one of its key objectives. For example, a recent Ministry of Education report[41] showed that New Zealand has one of the lowest higher education qualification completion rates in the OECD – just 58 per cent, compared to Australia's 72 per cent.

Although the NCEA is widely accepted as the terminal school qualification (as it provides access to university), it continues to create controversy. For example, the award of scholarship in some subjects has varied from year to year. In mathematics, for example, in 2002, more than 5,000 candidates were graded 'excellent' in a mathematics standard, but in 2003, only 70 (following a controversy). Each year when the results are released there are usually concerns expressed about standards of achievement. This year proved to be no different.[42] Such controversies have forced changes in the NZQA (which itself has been subject to three external reviews, and there have been several changes of CEO).

However, there are other problems. As noted above, the Ministry of Education has responsibility for developing curriculum, and according to the NZQA, the Ministry of Education also has (if NZQA's documentation is to be believed) ultimate responsibility for developing achievement standards (via its Standards Setting Bodies). Unfortunately, the process of curriculum development and standards setting has not always gone hand in hand and it seems that the NZQA still has some responsibility to set the achievement standards. In the case of senior secondary school history, for example, achievement standards were produced by the Standards Setting Body in time for the introduction of the NCEA in 2002. It is unclear how this was achieved and how much consultation with stakeholders took place. However, since then, the Ministry has introduced a new history curriculum across the schooling sector and this must be aligned with

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[41] http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/42059   [10 June 2009].

[42] For example, see http://www.stuff.co.nz/sunday-star-times/news/2417397/National Certificate of Educational Achievement-credits-for-reading-Wikipedia-sending-emails [10 June 2009].

achievement standards (at Years 11-13). The new curriculum document has been released, but the achievement standards (which will be used to assess student learning) have yet to be developed. The issue is complicated and confusing. For example, information from the Ministry of Education suggests that it has joint responsibility with the NZQA to develop the standards, yet the curriculum seems to have been released without any consideration of how learning in the area might be assessed in terms of achievement standards. To make matters worse, in the interim, a National-led Government has been elected and developments in senior secondary history, at least, seem to have come to a standstill.

However, of relevance to this chapter is the Labour Government's response to other failings of the NQF. In 1999, when it was first elected, the Labour Government maintained that the NQF (and particularly, the market-led education system of which it was a central component) had failed to deliver the promised social and economic objectives. Controversies in the funding of some providers sharpened the Government's thinking in the area (Strathdee 2009a). The administration maintained that the tertiary education system did not reflect the needs of employers; incomes had not be increased as promised; and that many of the courses on offer were of low quality. In its view, it would be better if the Government invested in areas of strategic priority. It took almost six years to bring about change. By 2005, a new funding and planning system was in place cutting across the key aims of the original NQF, which was to create markets in education and training in the hope that this would make skill development employer-led. This is considered more fully in the following section.

New investment approach

As noted above, the market-led post-compulsory education system was based on a number of key principles. These are well understood and are only noted here.

- First, State funding should reflect student choice.

- Second, the same level of State funding should be awarded to different types of providers that offer the same kind of training on the grounds that favouring one kind of institution ahead of another would distort the market.

- Third, students should pay for the cost of their tuition.

- Fourth, providers had no monopoly on provision. This meant that there was no reason, for example, that universities would be the only institutions to offer degrees.

Policies enacted to support the first two of these principles had the effect of dramatically increasing participation in tertiary education. Much of this expansion was in private training establishments, which had emerged to take advantage of increased access to funding that had been enabled by the introduction of the NQF and which had to only be available to public sector providers and in *wānanga*, these institutions focusing upon increasing their rolls as a way to gain increased funding.

Expansion was encouraged further by an unwillingness on the part of successive administrations to support fully principle three above. In no small measure, this reflects the continuing influence of social democracy in State intervention. Over time, fees were gradually increased to 25 per cent of course costs. However, the State continued to pay the lion's share of the costs.

Moreover, to prevent those from poorer backgrounds missing out on the opportunity to participate, loans to students to cover the cost of their tuition and some of their living expenses were provided on easy terms. Progress was made towards achieving principle four, with universities losing their monopoly on the provision of degree-level training. In addition, one former polytechnic gained university status.

The upshot of these policies was the creation of a tertiary sector that was shaped by a mixture of policies and which suited no group. Social democrats could take heart from the introduction of policies that increased access, such as broadening the range of providers that could confer degrees, and those that limited the impact of neo-liberalism on students, such as the provision of student loans and the limitation placed on the level at which the users could be charged for their use of tertiary education. Neo-liberal interests could take some heart from moves to increase consumer choice. However, the absence of strong price mechanisms meant that student choices need not reflect demand for skill in the labour market. Thus, a 'market' of the sort originally envisioned by creators of the NQF did not exist. There was little for conservatives to celebrate in the reforms. Access to higher education had become open to virtually all who completed secondary school, and universities and other providers of NQF-registered qualifications were offering new programmes designed to attract students rather than to preserve elite forms of knowledge. In addition, working-class groups were not disadvantaged in gaining access to any greater extent than they were under previous regimes as most gained the qualifications needed to enter university in New Zealand (Hughes and Pearce 2003; Strathdee and Hughes 2007).

The Labour-led Coalition was not happy either. Although these measures increased enrolments dramatically, the outcomes from this were seen by them as unsatisfactory in terms of the quality of training delivered and the appropriateness of the skills produced. Again the irony here is that the NQF was originally enacted by a Labour Government for just these reasons. Thus, despite the systems of ITOs, which were supposed to represent employers' interests in skill, two key problems persisted. First, there was no strong evidence that employers as a group were embracing the NQF. Second, there was evidence that learners were making decisions about training at some distance from the labour market. For their part, providers of training linked to the NQF were offering training that was attractive to students irrespective of the value in the labour market of the qualifications on offer. For example, some providers offered inducements for courses that had little relevance to the labour market, for example, 'twilight golf' (Strathdee 2009a). To make things worse, there was little evidence that the students who were enrolled in the courses actually made use of the opportunities by attending class. These and other problems had contributed to falling incomes (New Zealand Office of the Prime Minister 2002). Indeed, the Labour Government argued that the previous administration's voluntary, or 'neo-liberal', approach to training (which Labour had actually introduced) had put the country at economic and social risk because employers were not investing sufficiently in education and training (Strathdee 2005a)

Upon election, the Labour-led Government embarked on a major tertiary education system. At a strategic level, it began by establishing the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC). This Commission was charged with the task of developing, amongst other things, a more cooperative and collaborative tertiary education sector and a sector where there was a greater sense of partnership. The Government's overall stated aim was to end market-

based provision and to direct its investment in tertiary-level training into areas of strategic relevance.

It is important to note that, in theory, the changes do not impact direcy upon the NQF, as it remains primarily a method of recognizing and rewarding achievement. However, the changes will have an important impact upon the uptake of various kinds of learning recognized by the NQF.

Although the Labour-led Coalition identified the problems in the provision of tertiary education and training in 1999, and was taking steps to reform the system, change was slow and the state was poorly placed to meet the challenges presented. By mid-2002, the Tertiary Education Strategy had been established, and in 2003 the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) was created to execute it. Under the rules that were created when the NQF was enacted, institutions were allowed to grow their enrolments as they desired, with market forces determining supply and demand of training. However, as cost escalated, the Government capped enrolments.

While the TEC enacted some measures to curb costs, in general, it struggled to manage the changes and in its first two years was subjected to three significant reviews, covering structure, governance and its role in the broader education sector. Other problems also emerged, which limited the State's ability to manage the provision of education and training. For example, the Government found that the legislation meant it could not refuse to fund providers once students had enrolled, nor could it recover funds when courses were not actually offered or completed. Another issue was that administrative control of the sector was split between the TEC (which approved courses for payment) and the NZQA (which was responsible for approving courses for quality). Neither organization was in complete control. Indeed, the NZQA had delegated quality assurance to some providers (for example, the *wānanga* and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee). In one case, a provider of mainly second chance education gained more revenue from the Government than the University of Auckland, New Zealand's largest university (Strathdee 2009a).

As part of its solution to this problem, the Labour-led Government developed a growth strategy expressed in its Growth and Innovation Framework (GIF). The GIF identified three areas of activity as critical to national economic growth – biotechnology, information and communications technology, and design – and created a number of strategies aimed at improving economic performance. In contrast to the market-led system of provision that characterized the earlier period, in the contemporary period a new Centre-Left Government (1999-2008) adopted a new approach to tertiary education. This is referred to as the "investment approach". The overarching principle was that investment in education would reflect regional and national priorities. As part of establishing the new funding model, by 2006 all providers of tertiary education and training were subjected to tests of relevance. In contrast to the earlier approach, where providers could offer any qualifications registered on the NQF, the Government now only funds programmes deemed relevant to the strategic direction it had set itself. To establish relevance, each Tertiary Education Organization must have an approved Charter and Profile in which training is linked to the NQF. Although there are important differences between the two documents, Charters and Profiles are negotiated between the TEC (which oversees the funding of tertiary education) and individual providers of tertiary education, and are intended to provide the State with a way to monitor the quality and direction of the tertiary sector.

In general, the TEC assesses the activities of providers against four areas of strategic priority: excellence (raising the quality of teaching, learning and research to equip learners with the skill and competencies they require); relevance (ensuring a Tertiary Education Organization's activities contribute to the key national economic and social goals as set out in the Tertiary Education Strategy and the Government Tertiary Education Priorities); access (ensuring equity of access and opportunity for students, particularly for Māori and Pacific people); and capability (raising organization and system capability). As part of the process of determining funding priorities and encouraging providers to deliver on these, the Tertiary Education Commission employed agents in the regions to develop linkages between providers and employers.

Through funding providers according to their profile and limited growth, the then Government hoped to direct more effectively its investment in tertiary education and training. The idea was to create a network of provision in which providers of tertiary education did not compete with each other and work closely with employers in their regions to increase the relevance of the training linked to the NQF they provide. Indeed, in the place of competition, cooperation was stressed.

Essentially, New Zealand now operates under a system where all qualifications must be described in terms of course objectives and learning profiles and they must be registered on the Framework. However, institutions do not have to adopt assessment against standards in the way these were first envisioned, and the NZQA delegates the responsibilities for accrediting programmes to different agencies such as the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The introduction of the investment approach means that providers must gain additional approval before they can offer training, and this must be consistent with their charters and profiles. Also, providers are not funded on the basis of the number of students that turn up. Rather, funding levels are predetermined by the Government. This latter development has created difficulties because National Certificate of Educational Achievement results do not provide an easy method for selecting students. (Vlaardingerbroek 2006)

Finally, at the point of writing this chapter, the new National Government, which was elected at the end of 2008, has signalled that it does not want to continue with the former Government's investment approach. Quite what this will mean in policy remains to be seen. In relation to the NQF, one idea that has been raised is that the terminology of unit standards and achievement standards will be abandoned in favour of the term 'standards'. However, this is likely to be problematic, as the achievement standards and unit standards are constructed in different ways.

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Chapter 4: From old to new: The Australian Qualifications Framework
- Leesa Wheelahan

1. Introduction

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a 'first generation' qualifications framework (Tuck 2007, p. 1) that was established in 1995. Its purpose was to create 'a comprehensive, nationally consistent yet flexible framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training' (AQFAB 2007, p. 1). It encompasses all post-compulsory qualifications in Australia, which includes: senior school certificates, vocational education and training (VET) qualifications and higher education qualifications. It is often portrayed as a good example of a relatively 'weak' or 'loose' qualifications framework because it does not have a direct role in accrediting qualifications or in quality assurance.[43] Jack Keating (2003, p. 16) explains that the influence of the AQF 'depends upon the willingness of the powerful partners to use it as a framework to advance reforms'. This has been both a strength and a weakness of the AQF. It has had most impact on VET where it has been pivotal in creating a national VET system and nationally-recognized VET qualifications, but its influence has been less in universities and difficult to discern in the senior school certificates (Keating 2008b).

All this is set to change. In November 2007, the previous conservative National Government was voted out after 11 years and a Labor Government was elected. The Australian Labor Party (2007a, p. 5) promised to inaugurate an 'education revolution', so that Australia would 'become the most educated country, the most skilled economy and the best trained workforce in the world.' Among other things, it created a new governing body for the AQF – the Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC) which will be situated within a new, stronger national regulatory body that will first have responsibility for higher education and later for VET (Commonwealth of Australia 2009). The AQFC has been asked by the Government to advise on how the AQF can be strengthened and made more 'robust' (Gillard 2009c). The AQFC (2009) is currently undertaking a public consultation on how best it may do this. It is clear that the new AQF will almost certainly be based on a taxonomy of learning outcomes, explicit levels and a measure of volume (or time) of learning. As we will see, this 'architecture' is more extensive than the existing AQF. While these changes do not necessarily mean that the AQF will have a greater regulatory role, broader policy means that it almost certainly will do so.[44] The new Labor

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[43] While this remains true, it has begun to have a more regulatory role indirectly through other mechanisms. This will be discussed later in this chapter. See Keating (2000; 2003, p. 279), Young (2005, p. 13), Tuck (2007, p. 32) for a discussion of Australia's designation as a weak/enabling framework.

[44] This is also signalled by the composition of the new AQFC. The Government has appointed John Dawkins as the Chair of the new AQFC. Dawkins was the Labor

Government is developing tighter regulatory and accountability arrangements for *all* sectors of post-compulsory education, and not just VET, and the strengthening of the AQF is part of that process.

This chapter thus tries to capture an important time of transition in Australia as it moves from a relatively weak qualifications framework to a stronger one. It argues that there is a fundamental tension at the heart of the AQF that arises because VET qualifications are based on competency-based training models of curriculum, while higher education qualifications and senior school certificates are based on in-put models of curriculum. This has limited its effectiveness in implementing one of its key objectives, which is to facilitate student transfers, pathways and credit transfer between education sectors. The AQF's limited success in achieving this objective is one of the problems that the current review is trying to solve. The Chair of the AQFC, John Dawkins, explains that:

> Our goal should be to create greater synergy between the sectors, optimise entrance pathways and transferability between the sectors – bridging academia and VET with student flows and outcomes enhancing the workforce capacity across Australia. (Dawkins 2009)

The strengthened AQF will contribute to clearer relationships between qualifications, and it will also, in different ways, pressure all sectors of post-compulsory education and training to do things differently so that there is greater alignment between them. However, it is not clear that the current mooted reforms to the AQF will solve the contradiction between two models of curriculum that are, as it will be argued, incommensurable. This chapter will also argue that the AQF needs reform as part of wider changes to education policy, but that the options presented in the AQFC's consultation paper may create problems if the outcome is a unified 'tight' qualifications framework in contrast to a unified 'loose' framework that is supported by 'policy breadth' (Raffe 2005).

Structure of the chapter

Section 2 of this chapter provides the broader context for the AQF by outlining key features of Australian society, educational participation in and outcomes from education, and the relationship between qualifications and the labour market. Section 3 outlines the broader policy in which the AQF was developed and Australia's federal structure of government and responsibilities for education. It also presents a brief and outline of the higher education, VET and school sectors and it concludes with a discussion of the trajectory of policy. Section 4 outlines the origins, development, nature and structure of the AQF and presents an outline of educational outcomes in which the AQF has played a role. It also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the AQF and explains why it is now being reviewed. Finally, Section 5 discusses the future of the AQF.

Education Minister in the late 1980s who was responsible for the unification of the higher education system which merged colleges of advanced education with universities, and the creation of a national VET system based on competency-based training models of curriculum. The transformation of both tertiary education sectors is referred to in short-hand as 'the Dawkins reforms'. So when Dawkins (2009) says that, 'The proposal to include the AQF within the proposed new regulatory body may lead to its wider observance', this is understood to mean that it will result in this outcome.

2. Setting the context 1: Australia in a nutshell

Australia has a population of almost 22 million people.[45] Before British colonization in 1778 it was, for at least 50,000 years, home to its culturally, socially and linguistically diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[46] Australia was not constituted as one nation until 1901 when the six British colonies joined in one federation and it now has six States and two Territories. It is a land of immigrants, with about one quarter of all Australians born overseas (ABS 2008a). It is a vast dry island-continent where the culturally diverse population is mostly concentrated in large cities on the coasts. Australia is rich in natural resources and it was experiencing a sustained economic boom until the recent global financial crisis (Knight and Mlotkowski 2009, p. 12). This prosperity is demonstrated by the fact that, when adjusted for inflation and population growth, Australia now produces over 50 per cent more goods and services than it did 15 years ago (Buchanan et al. 2009, p. 7). However, this prosperity is not evenly distributed over households as those who live in capital cities earn more than those who live elsewhere, and the wealthiest 20 per cent of the population have 61 per cent of household wealth, while the bottom 20 per cent have 1 per cent of household wealth (ABS 2008b, pp. 276, 279).

The qualifications profile of Australians and participation in learning

The rate of retention for students completing secondary school was just over 74 per cent in 2007, and this has not changed substantially since 1997 when it was just below 72 per cent (ABS 2008d, p. 4). The recent Review of Australian Higher Education notes that this compares well to an OECD average (in 2005) of 69 per cent, but it argues that this is still well below the top six performing OECD countries (Bradley 2008, pp. 17, 19). Most Australian State Governments have increased or will increase the school leaving age from around 15-16 years to 17 years, and students will have to be 'earning or learning' in school, training or work.

The proportion of Australians holding a non-school qualification has grown over the last 10 years, and around 54 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 years held a non-school qualification in 2008 compared to 42 per cent in 1998 (ABS 2008c, p. 3).The greatest growth was in the group with a bachelor degree or above as their prior highest qualification, while there was a slower rate of growth in the group with an advanced diploma/diploma or below as their highest qualification (ABS 2007b, p. 1). Non-school qualifications below advanced diplomas/diplomas are certificates IV, certificates III, certificates II and certificates I.

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[45] Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/1647509ef7e25faaca2568a900154b63?OpenDocument [10 June 2009].

[46] See http://www.culture.gov.au/articles/indigenous/ [11 June 2009].

Some 22 per cent of those aged between 15 and 64 years in 2008 held a bachelor degree or above as their highest qualification, with this rising to 32 per cent for those aged between 25-34 years (ABS 2008a, Table 14). Australia has slipped in the percentage of its population aged between 25-34 years with a bachelor degree or above from seventh place in the OECD in 1996 to ninth place in 2006. Its percentage of this age group with a degree is similar to the OECD average, but is rather less than the top six OECD countries (Bradley 2008, p. 18).

In 2008, some 31 per cent of those aged between 15-64 years held an advanced diploma/diploma or below as their highest qualification (ABS 2008a, p. 3). The most common non-school qualifications (in 2007) held by men were certificates I-IV (31 per cent) and bachelor degrees or above (23 per cent), while 25 per cent of women held a bachelor degree or above and 19 per cent held a certificate I-IV. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2007b: 1) explains that this pattern reflects the gendered segregation of Australian occupations, with women less likely to work in occupations requiring a vocational qualification than men (such as the industrial trades which require traditional apprenticeships).

In a pattern that is typical of most countries (Santiago et al. 2008), those least likely to finish school in Australia and undertake the senior school certificate are students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. They are also over-represented among those undertaking VET-in-schools subjects as part of their senior school certificate (Teese et al. 2006). High SES students are far more likely to go to university whereas low SES students are more likely to go to vocational education and training (VET). Low SES students are around 15-16 per cent of all higher education students (and have been so since at least the early 1990s) whereas if they reflected their share of the Australian population they should be 25 per cent (CSHE 2008). Low SES students are over-represented in VET but they are most over-represented in lower-level VET qualifications, while they are only 20 per cent of students in VET diplomas and advanced diplomas (Foley 2007). VET diplomas and advanced diplomas are the main qualifications used by VET students to gain access to degrees, and one consequence is that these pathways deepen participation in higher education by existing social groups, but they do not widen participation for under-represented disadvantaged students (Wheelahan 2009c). This is so even though a key objective of the AQF is to promote equity through providing disadvantaged students with access to higher education via VET pathways.

Participation by adults in formal, non-formal and informal learning in Australia is high by international standards. The ABS (2007a, p. 3) defines formal learning as structured learning taught in institutions and organizations (including workplaces) if it leads to a formal qualification within the AQF. Non-formal learning is structured, taught learning that does not lead to an AQF qualification. Informal learning refers to unstructured, non-institutionalized learning related to work, family, community or leisure. Some 12 per cent of Australians aged between 25-64 years reported participating in formal learning in 2007, while 30 per cent participated in non-formal learning, and 74 per cent participated in some form of informal learning. Younger adults were more likely to participate in formal learning, while similar numbers in all age groups participated in non-formal and informal learning, except for those aged between 60-64 years. Participation in all forms of learning rises with level of educational qualification so that those with a bachelor degree or above had higher levels of participation in all forms of learning compared to those with lower-level qualifications or those who do not have non-school qualifications. Similarly, those in full-time employment had higher levels of participation in some form of

learning (84 per cent), which was similar to those in part-time work (82 per cent),[47] but more than those who were unemployed (76 per cent) and those not in the labour force (62 per cent) (ibid., Table 1). Higher income earners also had higher levels of participation in all forms of learning than those on lower incomes.

The Australian Government has established new targets for participating in and completing schooling, VET qualifications and higher education qualifications. These are to:

- increase the proportion of the population aged 25-34 years with a degree from 32 per cent in 2008 to 40 per cent by 2025;

- halve the proportion of Australians aged 20 to 64 years without a certificate level III qualification by 2020;

- double the number of VET higher qualification completions (diplomas and advanced diplomas) by 2020;

- raise the proportion of young people achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification from 74 per cent in 2007 to 90 per cent by 2015;

- increase the percentage of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in universities from around 15-16 per cent in 2007 to 20 per cent by 2020; and,

- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020 (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p. 12).

The Government says that Australia must meet these targets if it is to remain competitive in the international economy and if it is to become more equitable and socially inclusive. Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister, Julia Gillard (2009b), argues that 'upskilling' is more urgent in the global economic crisis than it was when Labor's education policies were first formulated during the economic boom. The Government is introducing a range of policies that it hopes will alleviate some of the worst effects of the economic crisis on young people which includes the guarantee of a training place for those aged under 25 years, and access to income support benefits will be conditional on participation in training (Rudd 2009). This is consistent with the Government's broader 'welfare to work' policies that make training a requirement for those on benefits. However the effectiveness of these policies has been questioned with Lim (2008) arguing that they are a policy-tightening exercise rather than a labour market policy aimed at enhancing the skills of welfare benefit recipients. Barnett and Spoehr (2008) argue that current policies do not adequately distinguish between training for short-term, insecure employment and that required for high quality employment.

The 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education commissioned economic modelling that showed that Australia would experience a substantial under-supply of graduates with degrees and advanced diplomas/diplomas over the next

[47] However, while full-time workers had similar levels of participation in formal learning compared to part-time workers, they had higher levels of participation in non-formal learning; 38 and 29.5 per cent respectively.

decade and this is informing Government policy (Bradley 2008, p. 16). A contributory factor is, as it is in many other developed nations, the aging of population (Knight and Mlotkowski 2009, p. 13).[48] Consequently, policy is concerned with increasing the retention of older workers in employment and with increasing their skills, particularly as they are less likely to have finished school or hold post-school qualifications (Karmel 2008a). The objective of these policies on retaining older workers and increasing the percentage of young people who finish school and obtain non-school qualifications is to ensure Australia does not experience the same kind of skill shortages as it had during the economic boom.

Arguments by Government to increase the percentage of the population with higher-level qualifications are also linked to its social inclusion policy because those with higher level qualifications are more likely to have jobs and higher rates of pay (Gillard 2009d). However, social inclusion is understood as inclusion in the labour market as the basis for social participation in a marketised society, and this is not the same as arguments about distributive justice which are concerned with socially just outcomes of education as the basis for broader social, civic and political concerns. Knight and Mlotkowski (2009, p. 22) explain that:

> [… the human capital model] … in Australia has become the dominant way of thinking about the links between education and training and the labour market. Under this model, education and training are seen as an investment in an individual's productive capacity, and are motivated by an expectation of a return on that investment.

The labour market and qualifications

Keating (2008a, p. 9) explains that compared to Australia, 'most OECD countries have a larger percentage of their workforce in the manufacturing sectors and lower levels of casual employment.' There has been a shift in Australia towards more highly-skilled jobs at the expense of middle-ranking skilled jobs in areas such as the trades and advanced clerical and service jobs, while the share of less-skilled jobs has fallen only slightly (Cully 2008, pp. 5-6). Where there has been growth in low-skilled occupations, it has been in service work and support tasks which have been 'created by knowledge workers' demand for services which previously would have been provided within the household' (Cully 2008, p. 6). In Australia, as in some other Anglophone countries, participation rates by women have increased; union membership and award protection have declined as a result of deregulated markets and government policies to weaken union powers; the labour market has become increasingly casualized (van Wanrooy et al. 2007); and there is more heterogeneity in work arrangements with those working the 'standard' full-time week now in the minority (Cully 2008, p. 4). Pocock (2009, p. 10) explains that 'in 2007, 24.1 per cent of Australian workers were employed for 20 hours or less per week, compared to 15.4 per cent in the OECD as a whole'. Keating (2008a,

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[48] However, there are arguments that there is no need to be overly alarmist about impending skill shortages, and that business cycles could have a greater impact on skill shortages than demographic trends (Karmel 2009a).

p. 9) contrasts Australia's labour market with more regulated European labour markets that have 'regulations or sectoral agreements specifying the types and levels of qualifications required for occupations and industry job types.' He also explains that many other countries have a stronger emphasis on VET in secondary schools and orient their school-based VET systems to industry areas.

The 'fit' between qualifications in the VET and higher education sectors in Australia and the occupational destinations for which students are being prepared is very loose, except for the trades and other regulated occupations (such as electrician and physician) (Karmel et al. 2008). Moreover, the labour market destinations of VET and higher education graduates have become less differentiated with graduates from VET advanced diplomas/diplomas often competing with bachelor degree graduates for the same positions, and in many industries diplomas are being replaced by degrees as the entry level qualification (Foster et al. 2007; Karmel and Cully 2009). However, Karmel and Cully (2009, p. 10) explain that:

> … apart from the licensed occupations (particularly the professions and some of the trades), employers rarely require job applicants to hold a non-school qualification…. They are much more likely to specify a set of skills and personal attributes they expect an individual to have. Another way of putting this is that, while all jobs can be assigned into an occupation, the extent of pure occupational labour markets - those characterised by a required qualification - is limited.

Overall, when specific, rather than broad, occupational areas are considered, around 37 per cent of VET student graduates in 2007 reported that they were working in the occupation associated with their VET qualification and this varied extensively by occupational field, ranging from around 14 per cent for managers to almost 61 per cent for technicians and trades.[49] A further 41 per cent reported that their training was relevant or highly relevant to their job, while 21 per cent reported that their training had little relevance (Karmel et al. 2008: 19). Knight and Mlotkowski (2009, p. 24) cite research that shows that '57.8 per cent of workers report that their skills and abilities are well matched to their current job, while 30.6 per cent report to being moderately over-skilled, and 11.5 per cent report to being severely over-skilled.'

The extent to which employers engage with VET varies by industry and by size of employer. Stanwick (2009) shows that about 54 per cent of employers used the VET system to a greater or lesser extent in 2007. Larger firms are more likely to engage in training than small firms, and this also varies by the extent to which specific industries require employees to have vocational qualifications, or where there are regulatory, licensing or occupational health and safety requirements. In 2007, some 33 per cent of employers reported that they had jobs requiring vocational qualifications; 22 per cent reported that they used nationally-recognized (accredited) training; 29 per cent employed apprentices or trainees; 49 per cent reported using unaccredited (non-formal) training, 71 per

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[49] The match between the intended destination of the qualification and students' actual destination was much higher among those undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships (overall at 60.7 per cent at the specific rather than broad group level), but even here there was great variation. It ranged from 11.7 per cent for managers to 84.6 per cent for technicians and trades workers (Karmel et al. 2008, p. 13).

cent reported using informal training, and 14 per cent reported using no training (Knight and Mlotkowski 2009, Table 17).

Cully (2005, p. 8) says that employers are aware of VET, but they find it too complex. This is a particular problem for small- and medium-sized firms, but even large firms find it difficult to navigate the system. Those that are most successful in doing so are firms with staff who had formal responsibility for training. However, almost 81 per cent employers with jobs requiring vocational qualifications were satisfied with VET in meeting their skill needs (NCVER 2008b). Karmel and Cully make the point that government funding and incentives help to shape employer training practices. They argue that while employer subsidies for trainees increased from 1997 to 2005:

> … the number of hours of employer-provided training per working hour fell by 22 %, at the same time as existing worker traineeships came to account for around a third of trainee commencements.[50] This suggests that some government incentives do not actually increase the level of training to a large degree. (Karmel and Cully 2009, p. 10)

Employers' engagement with VET training is only a small component of all VET, as it is with higher education. In 2005, the majority of students studying non-school qualifications were studying on their own behalf, with 21 per cent of students studying a non-school qualification receiving financial support from an employer. In VET overall, around 30 per cent of students received financial support from an employer, including 21 per cent for those undertaking an advanced diploma/diploma; almost 40 per cent of those undertaking a certificate III/IV; and 10 per cent of those undertaking a certificate I/II. The peak at certificate III/IV is because most apprenticeships are at this level. In contrast, only 7 per cent of those undertaking a bachelor degree received support from an employer, but this rose to 28 per cent for those undertaking a graduate diploma/certificate and 23 per cent of those undertaking a post-graduate degree. Many graduate diploma/certificates and many course-work masters are strongly vocational and people often undertake these qualifications as part of their professional 'upskilling' (ABS 2005, Table 4).[51]

The way in which individuals, governments, businesses and others in society who have an interest in the outcomes of education engage with education is mediated by Australia's system of government and the structures of Australia's sectors of education. It is to this that we now turn.

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[50] 'Existing worker traineeships' are traineeships which are undertaken by staff already employed at the firm.

[51] The ABS very unhelpfully used the age range of 15-69 years in this report, whereas most of their reports use the age range of 15-64 years.

3. Setting the context 2: Broader policy, government, and education sectors

The structure and nature of Australian education has changed profoundly over the last 20 years. Raffe (2002, p. 9) explains that common global trends have given rise to similar pressures for the convergence of vocational and general education in post-16 education, and to '...a common policy rhetoric: the knowledge economy, lifelong learning, parity of esteem, flexibility of pathways, and so on.' The reforms to Australian education have much in common with other Anglophone nations and there has been considerable policy migration and policy borrowing between them based on their similarly-structured labour markets and the commitment by Anglophone governments to neo-liberal market principles and policies (Priestley 2002). Anglophone nations redefined the purpose of education as serving the needs of the economy so that education 'was seen as crucial to economic competitiveness, mobilised for economic reconstruction, and embedded in micro-economic reform, corporatization and marketization' (Marginson 1997, p. 151).

Anglophone governments believe that markets are the best way to deliver services because competition (putatively) makes providers of goods and services more responsive to customer needs. Consequently, according to this perspective, education should be a market to reduce so-called 'producer capture' by education institutions and to elicit competitive and entrepreneurial behaviour from them to ensure they are responsive to 'client' needs. Governments proclaim that the aim of these reforms is to make education 'demand led' by students and employers rather than 'user led' by educational institutions (Young and Allais 2009, p. 2). However, despite the sustained implementation of these policies over at least 20 years, there is little evidence that they have succeeded and, in particular, it is difficult to find any research that demonstrates that fully contestable markets in education have achieved the outcomes sought by government (Wheelahan 2009b).[52]

Qualifications frameworks in Anglophone countries help to reduce the power of educational institutions because they define qualifications and outcomes of learning independently of educational institutions (Young 2008). Tuck (2007, p. 4) explains that this is a feature of NQFs in Anglophone countries that is not necessarily found in other qualification *systems* which may include, but are more than, NQFs. Even though the AQF was not as ambitious in scope as NQFs in some other Anglophone countries, like these countries, for reasons that will be discussed later, the AQF has been more successful in severing the link between qualifications and institutions in VET than it has in higher education or schools. However, the AQF has been important in Australia in establishing a market in qualifications (Moodie 2008). Qualifications frameworks are needed to structure and regulate a qualifications market in which qualifications are the unit of currency (masters, degrees, diplomas etc). They are the mechanism through

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[52] In an astonishingly frank article, Robin Ryan (2008, p. 11) who was involved in the development of marketization policies in VET, argues that these policies were developed on the basis of little evidence. He says 'the fundamental point of the desirability of market forces in VET has almost always been resolved simply by assertion, often with reference back to a report which had previously made the same act of faith.'

which fees, qualifications and jobs can be exchanged. This is why a qualifications framework applies to higher education (at least in Australia) even if it is unable to specify the learning outcomes for higher education with the same precision as with VET.

While there is a high level of congruence between education reforms in Australia and other Anglophone nations, there are also important differences 'as local traditions and influences merge with global trends' (Priestley 2002, p. 122). Global pressures are mediated within nations by political processes and governments, so that 'It is not the economic pressures themselves but rather how they are perceived which drives educational changes' (Raffe 2002, p. 5). The discourse of globalization is also used by governments in nation states as a mechanism to drive internal change, and in the case of the Anglophone countries, to implement neo-liberal reforms (Jarvis 2007). This also helps to account for the similarities between educational reforms in Anglophone countries, but also the difference between them.

Goozee (2001, p. 62) explains that the years 1987-1990 were characterized by strong interventionist government policies in Australia that were designed to respond to national economic needs, and this resulted in dislocation and constant restructuring for all sectors of education in Australia. However, governments have not had untrammelled power in this process. Keating (2008b, p. 3) argues:

> Broadly there are three agents in the ownership and management of qualifications: providers (universities, colleges, institutes, schools), the state and civil society in the form of professional, occupational and industrial communities and organizations.

The different relationships between these three 'agents' are mediated in different ways in schools, VET and higher education as a consequence of the different social relations and relative power of each constituency within and between each sector of education, but also by the federated structure of Australian Government.

Government

Government power in Australia is shared between a National Government (called the Australian or Commonwealth Government) and eight State and Territory Governments. Even though education is constitutionally a State Government responsibility, responsibility and funding for education is shared between the two levels of government. The three main sectors of education in Australia are schools, VET and higher education.[53] While the Australian

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[53] Adult and community education (ACE) is sometimes, and sometimes not, included as a sector, although it does come under the purview of the new ministerial council for tertiary education. ACE is constituted as a *sector* in some States (New South Wales and Victoria), and offers a range of programmes including accredited and funded VET programmes, with accompanying State Government infrastructure to support it. In other States, ACE is a form of provision, which is offered by TAFE institutes and other community-based providers, with the latter not funded to offer accredited VET programmes (Wheelahan et al. 2002). Pre-school and early childhood education is

Government is responsible for higher education and the State and Territory Governments are responsible for schools and VET, in practice control, responsibility and funding are shared between both levels of government. The Australian Government provides almost all government funding for higher education, but it provides some funding for schools and VET. Both Labor and conservative governments have vigorously used their minority funding to drive VET policy over the last 15 years, and the current Labor Government is increasingly doing so now in schools, as did the previous conservative government.

Co-ordination of education policy occurs through Ministerial Councils which include the Commonwealth, State and Territory Education and Training Ministers. The new Australian Labor Government overhauled the system of Ministerial Councils under the previous conservative government and established two new Ministerial Councils. The first is the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA). The second, and the one most relevant for this chapter, is the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE).[54] MCTEE has responsibility for higher education, VET, international education, adult and community education, the AQF, employment and youth policy (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p. 43). The creation of MCTEE is one element of the restructuring of post-compulsory education that will bring VET and higher education together in a more coherent tertiary education system. It replaces the previous conservative government's Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) which had specific responsibility for VET while all other sectors remained under the previous Ministerial Council, which was the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), thus contributing to reinforcing sectoral divisions.

While the formal arrangements between governments sound collaborative, Commonwealth/State relations have always been fraught in Australia, and this is as true of education and training policy as any other. Although State/Commonwealth relations can be fraught even when the same party is in power at both levels, they are much more so when all the States have a different party in power to the Commonwealth. This was the case during the 11 years of conservative Commonwealth Government with Labor Governments in all States and Territories for most of that time, and Commonwealth/State relations were particularly difficult and often openly hostile. Australia now has a Labor National Government and only one of the states has a conservative government, but most political commentators would argue that this situation will not remain for long.

increasingly seen as a sector of education, particularly since the commitment of the Labor Government that all Australian children aged 4 years will have access to structured educational experiences for 15 hours a week taught by qualified early childhood educators (Australian Labor Party 2007b).

[54] See the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website which explains the establishment of the two Ministerial Councils and the responsibilities of MCEEDYA:
http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/Programs/Pages/Ministerial_Council.aspx [22 Nov. 2009].

The new Labor Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, promised that his Government would engage in co-operative federalism in working with the States, and the States have so far willingly participated in this process. As a consequence, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has emerged with significant and hitherto unparalleled power. It consists of the Prime Minister and all State and Territory Premiers (the elected leaders of those Governments) and it is playing a key role in schools and VET policy. Arguably, COAG is, as a consequence, bypassing the state education and training departments and ministers in the process, particularly in VET policy (Moodie 2009; Ross 2008).

The contradiction at the heart of Australia's education sectors

Unlike most Anglophone nations, Australia has a deeply-tracked tertiary education system that differentiates VET and higher-education qualifications, curriculum, processes of learning, outcomes and purposes, but like most Anglophone nations, it has an untracked or unified secondary education system. This is at the heart of the contradiction in Australian post-compulsory education and training (Moodie 2005b, 2008; Keating 2006).

Young (2005, pp. 15-16) argues that NQFs are based on two tensions that arise from conflicting assumptions that are used to design qualifications. The first tension is around the principle of difference and the principle of similarity, and the second tension is around qualifications designed on the basis of inputs and those designed on the basis of outputs. Traditional, 'tracked' qualifications systems use the principle of difference because they emphasize the different purposes of VET and higher education qualifications and the different occupational destinations they are designed to serve. This works if graduates enter relatively stable labour market destinations and tracked systems are able to effectively allocate graduates to job vacancies and to careers that draw from the differentiated knowledge base in each sector (Moodie 2003). 'Unified' systems are designed to meet the needs of more fluid labour markets in which knowledge and skill requirements change in response to change in markets and processes of production and technology, and this means that they are putatively underpinned by common knowledge and skill requirements. There is less of a 'fit' between qualifications and their occupational destinations. This is encapsulated most clearly in policy that establishes generic skills as an important component of qualifications. The principle of similarity underpins qualifications frameworks in unified systems that emphasize progression to and from general and vocational education (Young 2005, p. 15).

Qualifications that are based on inputs assume that they cannot be defined independently of the syllabus, processes of learning and assessment and the institutional setting in which learning takes place. This usually requires a high level of trust between all stakeholders. Young (2005) refers to these types of qualifications systems as process-based or institutional systems. Qualifications that are based on outputs sever the link between the institution and learning outcomes because they are based on the premise that learning outcomes can be defined independently of when, how or where learning takes place. Process-based systems use shared agreement among stakeholders (such as professional bodies) about content, learning and assessment, whereas outcomes-based systems are premised on the specification of 'objective' criteria in a national framework (Young 2001, p. 11). Governments have used outcomes-based qualifications frameworks to support the shift from the 'provider culture' of

education and training institutions and awarding bodies to a 'user-led' marketized system. National criteria are needed where there is low trust and the 'rules' are used to regulate behaviour between stakeholders and to regulate buying and selling in a qualifications market. In fluid labour markets, the qualifications themselves become signifiers of the knowledge, skills and attributes of individuals (Young 2005).

Qualifications systems in Northern Europe tend to be tracked and process-oriented. In contrast, qualifications systems in Anglophone countries tend to be unified and outcomes-oriented (idem). This maps to the different ways each organizes their economies. The economies of Northern Europe use social partnerships between employers, business, and labour to match graduates to jobs in relatively stable labour markets, whereas Anglophone liberal market economies use the market as the mechanism for matching graduates and jobs in volatile labour markets (Hall and Soskice 2001).

The contradiction arises in Australia because it is a liberal market economy like Britain and the United States, but it has deeply differentiated VET and HE sectors that are in many ways similar to the tracked sectors characteristic of Northern Europe. However, unlike many countries in Northern Europe, which have tracked secondary systems of education, the senior years of secondary education in Australia have been relatively undifferentiated and the senior school certificates have been designed primarily to rank students for competitive entry to university (Keating 2006, pp. 62-63). Keating explains that:

> … the logic of these typologies would suggest that the post-school education sector in Australia should be similar to those of the UK, North America and New Zealand. Australia shares with these countries an untracked secondary school system, and upon this basis it should have a more diversified and generalist post-school sector. The open nature of these Anglophone generalist school systems allows for less regulated links with the post-school sectors which in turn can adapt into different orientations and generalist institutions. This contrasts with the academic and vocational tracks of the continental European secondary school systems that articulate relatively directly with the more specialized post-school sectors. (ibid., p.60).

This contradiction is all the more stark given that, as demonstrated earlier, there is a very loose fit between qualifications and their occupational destinations; the occupational differentiation that tracked systems are meant to serve takes place in a relatively undifferentiated labour market with VET advanced diploma/diploma graduates and degree graduates competing for the same jobs.

While the creation of the AQF was meant in part to deal with these contradictions, it has had only limited success in doing so. This is because the AQF was structured by, and the outcome of, broader policies that reinforced the distinction between the VET and higher education sectors, but without challenging the senior school certificates' primary emphasis on ranking students for university entry. At the same time as the Australian Government was creating a unified higher education system by amalgamating universities and colleges of advanced education in the late 1980s, it was implementing policies to create a national VET system 'in the skills development or industrial training mould' based on 'industry leadership' and competency-based models of curriculum (ibid., p. 61). While emphasizing that higher education has a vocational role, particularly for the professions, Karmel et al. (2008, p. 9) nonetheless say:

Vocational education and training (VET) is, by definition, vocational in intent. Its purpose is unashamedly instrumental; it is about acquiring skills to be used at work. This contrasts with the broader purposes of school education and university education, where education is often seen as an end in its own right.

This difference, broadly understood, has structured the sectors and the relationship between them.

Higher education

There are 37 public universities in Australia, and a large number of very small private educational providers which includes two small private not-for-profit universities, private-for-profit colleges, religious colleges and preparatory colleges established by public universities and private companies. Ten Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, which are publicly-funded VET institutions, are registered to offer two-year associate degrees and bachelor degrees, although almost all this provision is not publicly funded and is offered for full tuition fees. In 2007, public universities enrolled 94 per cent of all higher education students.[55]

The Australian Government has principal responsibility for universities, but they are established by State Acts of Parliament, and State Governments play a role in how they are shaped and the contribution they make to education provision and the economy. State governments are key players in deciding where new universities or campuses will be established, which is a matter of some importance because of the contribution universities make to local economies and communities. The State of Victoria is unusual because it has eight public universities and four of these are 'dual-sector universities' which include a large higher education and TAFE division. There is only one other dual-sector university and that is in the Northern Territory, which is a vast and sparsely populated region.

Government funding as a proportion of university income has steadily declined over the last 20 years and the Australian Government now contributes 41 per cent of universities' income, while State and local governments contribute 4 per cent. The proportion paid by students in fees and charges has steadily increased and is now 38 per cent of universities' total revenue. The source of Australian universities' revenue is shown in Table 1.

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[55] DEEWR (2008b): Table (ii): Summary of student load EFTSL (Equivalent Full-Time Student Loads), 2006 and 2007 full year.

Table 1. Sources of Australian universities' revenue, 2007 (AUD $'000)

Source	$'000	Per cent
Australian Government grants	7,016,258	41
Student fees and charges	6,563,790	38
Other income	1,336,455	8
Investment revenue	837,062	5
Consultancies and contracts	791,276	5
State and local governments	691,297	4
Royalties, trademarks and licenses	79,039	0
Total	17,315,177	100

Source: DEEWR (2008a) Adjusted statement of financial performance for each Higher Education Provider (HEP), 2007 (AUD $'000)

Australia's international education services are increasingly important for the Australian economy and for universities' incomes. This market consists of full-fee paying on-shore and off-shore international students. Education services are now Australia's largest service export and the third-largest export overall behind coal and iron ore (Bradley 2008, p. 87). Overseas student revenue is now 15 per cent of universities' revenue, while overseas students are 25 per cent of all higher education students. Internationalization of Australian higher education is now seen as a cultural and pedagogic imperative as well as an economic one (ibid.). Australia is currently experiencing a crisis in its international student market as a result of poor provision by private VET providers for on-shore international students. A growing number of small private-for-profit colleges have failed and the Australian and State governments are seeking to tighten regulations and quality assurance. While this is a VET 'problem', it has nonetheless damaged the reputation of all Australian tertiary education providers, and universities are worried about the impact this may have on demand for their programmes by overseas students.

Public universities receive funding to offer public under-graduate places to domestic students in undergraduate degrees and research higher degrees (research masters and PhDs), but other post-graduate courses are usually full-fee, which includes graduate certificates/diplomas, course-work masters and professional doctorates. The Labor Government has overturned a decision of the previous conservative government and prohibited public universities from offering full-fee under-graduate places to domestic students. Students in under-graduate public places make a substantial contribution to the cost of their degrees depending on the discipline in which they are enrolled, and in 2009 this ranged from 84 per cent in business and law, 52 per cent in the humanities, 32 per cent in medicine, to the lowest of 22 per cent in science.[56] Domestic research higher degree students do not pay fees. All public and full-fee-paying under-graduate

[56] Derived from Bradley (2008) and Commonwealth of Australia (2009) Indexed amounts for 2009
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/summaries_brochures/resources_for_student_administrators.htm [20 July 2009].

and post-graduate domestic students can defer payment of their fees in public universities and appropriately registered private higher education providers through an income-contingent loan. This means that they pay a percentage of their income through the tax system once their income reaches a threshold, which is around average week earnings and their debt does not accrue a real rate of interest.

The Australian Government has announced that it will introduce demand-driven funding for public higher education places at public universities based on student entitlements by 2012 (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p. 17). The Minister for Education, Julia Gillard (2009d) insists this is not a student voucher, however, this is a difficult argument to sustain given that universities will be funded only if students enrol at those institutions, and students are free to choose the institution in which they will enrol (provided they meet the entry criteria). Similar arrangements are considered 'indirect vouchers' in the literature (see Agasisti et al. (2009, p. 39) and the literature there cited). Other higher education institutions have been excluded from access to this funding at this stage, including TAFE, but commentators think that this position will be hard for the Government to sustain if it is insisting on a market-driven higher education sector with competitive private higher education institutions. Moreover, it will arguably be difficult for the Government to meet its higher education expansion targets without the involvement of TAFE, either through directly funding TAFE to deliver public higher education, or through franchise arrangements between TAFEs and universities.

Only universities and a very small number of other institutions are self-accrediting. Other institutions that wish to offer higher education qualifications must be registered with their State higher education registering body and each programme that they wish to offer must be accredited as well. The processes for registering higher education institutions and accrediting qualifications are similar in all states because all states implement the MCEETYA *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*. The purpose of the National Protocols is to:

> … protect the standing of Australian higher education nationally and internationally by assuring students and the community that higher education institutions in Australia have met identified criteria and are subject to appropriate government regulation (MCEETYA 2007, p. 1)

The protocols have criteria that must be followed in establishing universities; awarding self-accrediting status to higher education institutions that are not universities; registering non-self accrediting higher education institutions; and approving international higher education institutions that seek to operate in Australia. One of the conditions of registration is that accredited higher education qualifications must comply with the AQF higher education titles and qualifications descriptors. This is honoured more in the breach by universities, but it is enforced on all other higher education providers by the State government registering bodies. This is one way in which the AQF is indirectly coming to play a more regulatory role. It has, however, led to complaints among non-university providers and others in the sector that non-university providers are required to meet higher standards in accrediting their programmes than are universities (Wheelahan et al. 2009). In addition to this, all education providers from all sectors of education that wish to offer full-fee qualifications to overseas students must register their courses on the Commonwealth Register of

Institutions and Courses (CRICOS) and they cannot do so unless their courses are AQF compliant, and universities must comply with this.

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is responsible for auditing the quality of Australian universities and they are audited every five years. State Government higher education registering bodies are responsible for the quality of higher education programmes that they accredit, and they are also audited by AUQA. In addition, AUQA can choose to audit non-university higher education providers. However, there are perceptions that the current model is: '...too focused on inputs and processes and does not give sufficient weight to assuring and demonstrating outcomes and standards' (Bradley 2008, p. 115). Moreover, among other things, there are concerns about different and overlapping jurisdictions and regulatory and quality frameworks for registering higher education institutions, for VET, and for consumer protection for overseas students (idem). Consequently, a new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is to be established to evaluate higher education institutions against 'objective and comparative benchmarks of quality and performance' that are to be developed by TEQSA (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, p. 31). It will be established by 2010 and it will encompass VET by 2013.

Vocational education and training (VET)

The wide-ranging reforms to the VET sector in Australia since the 1980s have largely had bipartisan support from both Labor and conservative Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments. Before these reforms, each State and Territory had its own qualifications and systems of accreditation which were often not recognized in another State, even if the qualification was for the same occupation. The creation of a national VET system was a key component of Government attempts to transform VET into a lever of micro-economic reform, and to underpin industry restructuring and reforms to industrial relations. Government reforms sought to create:

- an open, competitive training market; and,

- a nationally coherent, 'industry-led' training system based on competency-based training frameworks, with nationally-recognized and portable qualifications.

As a consequence of these reforms, TAFE is only one educational 'provider' in a competitive VET market. All educational providers that wish to offer accredited VET qualifications must become a 'registered training organization' (RTO) by seeking registration with their State training authority. There are 59 TAFE institutes and over 2,000 other RTOs, and of these, around 30 per cent are community education providers or other government providers, while the rest are 'other' providers which include private training organizations as well as a small number of 'enterprise' providers who are registered to train their staff using accredited VET qualifications. However, TAFE remains the dominant provider and in 2007 it accounted for almost 79 per cent of all students, and around 84 per cent of the 'number of hours of delivery', which is how student load is measured in VET (NCVER 2008c, Tables 8 and 9). In 2006, some 19 per cent of VET students were apprentices and trainees (idem, Table 3). Two-thirds of all apprentices and trainees were male, and 46 per cent of all apprentices were in the Tradespersons and related workers (trades) occupational group. Just over 60 per cent of all male apprentices and trainees were in this group, compared to just over 16 per cent of females (ABS 2008b, p. 387).

The Australian and State and Territory Governments have co-operated to create a national VET system even though the relationships between them have been tense and difficult at times. Foremost within this is the National Skills Framework. It consists of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF)[57] and training packages. The purpose of the AQTF is to guarantee the quality of VET delivery and national recognition of VET qualifications, while training packages comprise nationally-portable VET qualifications. Publicly-funded VET qualifications in Australia *must* be based on national training packages, which consist of competency-based qualifications using 'industry'-specified units of competency. Units of competency describe discrete workplace requirements and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed to perform workplace tasks or roles (DEST 2007c). Training packages are the equivalent of the British National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Another way of explaining the AQTF and training packages and the distinctions between them is that the AQTF is concerned with regulating the providers of training and ensuring that the training they conduct is of high quality, while training packages are about the qualifications that are issued.

The AQTF was introduced in 2001 and was updated most recently in 2007 (DEST 2007a). The AQTF 2007 Essential Standards has three components which are:

- the essential standards for registration that RTOs must meet to deliver, assess and issue nationally-recognized qualifications. RTOs are audited against these standards through quality indicators which include employer satisfaction, learner satisfaction, and completion rate for units of competency (idem, p. 6);

- the standards that State and Territory registering bodies must meet in registering RTOs; and,

- voluntary 'excellence criteria' that RTOs can use 'to improve their performance' and thus gain recognition for meeting these criteria.

The national recognition of VET qualifications means that all qualifications or statements of attainment (which record completed units of competency, but not a full qualification) must be recognized by other RTOs throughout Australia.

Industry 'leadership' of VET is achieved by a number of mechanisms (Knight and Mlotkowski 2009, p. 29). This is achieved by:

- The National Quality Council (NQC), which is a committee of MCTEE, is responsible for quality assurance and the application of the AQTF. It is also responsible for endorsing training packages and is consequently a very powerful body. It comprises a range of representatives from peak employer bodies, a union representative, officials from the States and Commonwealth, a

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[57] It is unfortunate that the VET's quality assurance framework was entitled AQTF – it is too close to the AQF and causes considerable confusion for those trying to understand the VET system and the distinction between the AQTF and the AQF.

representative each from public and private providers, and two equity representatives.[58]

- The National Industry Skills Council (NISC), which provides advice to MCTEE on training, workforce planning and training priorities;[59] and,

- Eleven industry skills councils that are responsible for developing and maintaining training packages, as well as providing industry 'intelligence' to VET about training requirements through developing industry skill reports.[60]

In addition, the new Labor Government established 'Skills Australia', which is a statutory body that advises government on current and future skill needs in vocational and higher education.[61] There are also State and Territory industry training advisory bodies. Skills Australia has argued that the governance and industry advisory arrangements in VET are overly complex and need to be streamlined.

…and what happens in practice

While VET is meant to be a national system, in practice there is considerable diversity between the States because the States still retain authority for VET and manage VET systems. The Commonwealth contributes about 25 per cent of recurrent public funding to VET (Productivity Commission 2009, pp. 5-9), but most of this is distributed through the States. The States have differed in the way they have organized their VET systems and in particular, their TAFE systems. Victoria affords its TAFE institutes more independence from government than other States, but in a more marketized and competitive environment. Victoria also funds its TAFEs at around 13 per cent lower than the national average, and much lower than some individual States (Knight and Mlotkowski 2009, Table 16). There is also considerable variation in fees that students pay. Victoria is instituting an income-contingent loan for publicly- and privately-funded VET qualifications, whereas this option is open in other States only to students who pay full-fees for VET diplomas and advanced diplomas that lead to credit in degrees.

VET is often portrayed as the sector concerned with the education of adults, while higher education is often portrayed as the sector most concerned with school leavers. This is because young people under aged 25 years were around 60 per cent of all higher education students in 2006, while they were almost 43 per cent of VET students in the same year. However, VET has many more students in one year than higher education and VET has a much higher *number*

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[58] The NQC's website is: http://www.nqc.tvetaustralia.com.au/ [10 June 2009].

[59] NISC's website is: http://www.nisc.tvetaustralia.com.au/ [10 June 2009].

[60] This is an overarching website that provides information about and links to the 11 industry skills councils: http://www.isc.org.au/display_main.php?id=about [10 June 2009].

[61] Skills Australia's website is: http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/SkillsAustraliaHome.htm [10 June 2009].

of young people than higher education: there were 437,649 domestic higher education students aged under 25 years in 2006 (600,512 if international students are included), while there were 715,800 young people of the same age in VET.[62] This is important because VET qualifications are premised on the notion of workplace training and assume that students are in the workplace. The AQF website says, for example, in explaining VET qualifications:

> To be assessed as competent for one of the vocational qualifications, you have to show you can use your skills and knowledge under workplace conditions, *so a lot of your training will be in the workplace.*[63]

Yet most training is not in the workplace. Knight and Mlotkowski (2009: 34) explain that only 6.8 per cent of recognized VET delivery in the public VET system in 2006 took place in the workplace, while 75.2 per cent was campus or classroom based, 5.3 per cent was in online or other off-campus modes, and the remaining 12.7 per cent took place in other modes. Young students in VET have the same requirements as those in higher education; both require an education that will prepare them for work, for further learning, and for their broader development as the basis of their participation in society. However, VET students are required to undertake qualifications in which the rationale, pedagogy and curriculum are focussed on training in the workplace, even though this is a fiction.

Guthrie (2009, p. 25) says that there is strong support for Competency-Based Training (CBT) among industry peak bodies and skills councils, and that there is '...a large measure of support, but still some lingering disquiet, among providers using CBT, and amongst a number of academics.' He says that there is a need for '...a refined model of CBT which addresses some of the issues with the conception of competence and the ways Training Packages and the training system operate' (idem). He claims that 'On the whole, a strong case has not been made for an alternative approach' (idem). However, he argues later that better change management strategies are still needed, and that 'The secret will be to focus attention on those who are sceptical about training products and processes to convince them of the change required' (idem, p. 27). Arguably, Guthrie's tempered account of criticisms of CBT and training packages does not reflect much of the literature, while it may reflect the views of industry peak bodies and skills councils.

In the 2004 high level review of training packages, Schofield et al. (2004, p. 10) found that, on the one hand, there can be:

> … insufficient variation between the requirements for AQF qualifications. This can lead to poorly differentiated outcomes, the potential for the same groupings of units of competency to lead to multiple qualification outcomes for vastly different content and training effort.

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[62] DEST 2007b, Tables 19 and 20; NCVER 2008c, Table 2.

[63] Emphasis in original. See the AQF website: http://www.aqf.edu.au/aboutaqf.htm [13 June 2009].

On the other hand, there were wide variations in the size and dimensions of training package qualifications. The alignment of qualifications to AQF qualifications was shaped by '...industry's interpretation of the AQF descriptors and documentation… [and there] is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that in some instances, allocation of an AQF level to a qualification may be influenced by factors other than the content of the qualification, such as eligibility for New Apprenticeship incentives' (idem).

A recent OECD review of VET in Australia found many problems with training packages (Hoeckel et al. 2008, p. 36). The report says that the consultative nature of the training package development process means that there is a tendency for them 'to expand in order to accommodate every interest and concern' and many are hundreds of pages. Providers reported that they planned to use higher education qualifications because they were easier to deal with, and employers appeared unhappy with the current form of training packages. Training packages take a long time and are expensive to develop and this limits their relevance because skill requirements change frequently in some industrial sectors. They are designed around jobs (and workplace tasks or roles), yet 'they are not useful for students who want to study in a certain area but do not have a particular job in mind', and nor are they suitable for international students because they are designed for Australian jobs (idem). The OECD team say that they heard complaints that those who develop training packages are not in touch with the needs of industry, and they argue that in the absence of national assessments, 'there is no standard to ensure that a particular set of skills has in fact been acquired'. Moreover, training packages are 'frequently too complex to follow for teachers and trainers, who are not involved in their development.' They say that 'about 80 per cent of all publicly recorded enrolments in 2006 were in just 180 qualifications (out of the 1709 available). Around 70 qualifications were not used at all in 2006' (idem). This leads them to the conclusion that:

> Now that a national system is well established… [training packages] have outlived their usefulness, particularly in view of the time and effort involved in developing and maintaining them. (idem, p. 37)

However, they recommend that instead Australia adopt simple and briefer skills standards, and they offer NVQs as one possible model. They also recommend more external national assessments and more thorough marketization and demand-driven student funding models.

Training packages have also been controversial among TAFE teachers. In their high-level review of training packages, Schofield and McDonald (2004, p. 27) found that there was an 'unacceptably high level of confusion amongst educators in particular about the relationship between Training Packages and teaching, learning and assessment.' Furthermore, it wasn't just that teachers do not understand training packages, they are also hostile to them, and Schofield and McDonald (2004, p. 33) argued that this legacy needed to be dealt with if training packages were to be based on a 'new settlement'. They said that all parties needed to acknowledge that the introduction of training packages could have been better handled as a first step in engaging 'clients' (that is, teachers in this instance). They argued that a 'new settlement' was needed to underpin training packages and that part of this new settlement should be less regulation and more faith in the professionalism of teachers.

Schools[64]

School education is more thoroughly a State Government responsibility although the Australian Government has been seeking to increase its control over school education by making funding conditional on compliance with its policies. In 2006-2007, the Commonwealth provided 8.8 per cent of funding to government schools, while the State and Territory Governments provided 91.2 per cent. These proportions are reversed for funding of non-government schools: the Commonwealth provided 72.5 per cent of public funding while the States and Territory Governments provided 27.5 per cent (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 4.4).

Some 67.2 per cent school students attended government schools in 2005, while 32.8 per cent attended non-government schools. The percentage attending non-government primary schools in 2005 was 29.1 per cent, while the percentage attending non-government secondary schools was 37.9 per cent (MCEETYA 2009).[65] Keating (2003, p. 272) explains that non-government schools can be divided into low fee and comparatively open entry schools to high fee, selective schools. In 2005, some 61 per cent of students attending non-government schools were enrolled in Catholic schools (MCEETYA 2009). The percentage of students attending government schools rose by 1.7 per cent from 1997 to 2007, while the percentage attending non-government schools rose by 21.9 per cent over the same period (ABS 2008d, p. 4). Ryan and Watson (2004) argue that this drift to private schools has resulted in a higher proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in government schools. High fee and selective schools dominate entry to the elite universities, particularly to the elite professions (Keating 2003, p. 272; Teese 2000). Keating (2003, p. 272) explains that:

> … unlike almost every other OECD country, and in contrast to other large non-government systems such as Belgium and the Netherlands (Eurydice 2001) non-government schools are free to select students on their capacity to pay fees as well as their academic and other prowess.

Each State has its own senior school certificate and a board of studies which is a statutory body and independent from the State education departments. Boards of studies are responsible for the senior school curriculum and exams and for awarding qualifications. The senior school certificates are geared towards university entrance, and students are 'ranked' and awarded a tertiary entrance rank depending on their grades in the senior school certificate (Keating 2000, 2003). Keating (2003, p. 272) argues that the boards of studies have powerful constituencies in elite academic schools and universities and this contributes to their relative autonomy and capacity to resist thorough reform of the senior school certificates. These relationships are sustained through membership of subject or curriculum committees and other networks (Keating 2006, p. 61).

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[64] This section is primarily dependent on Jack Keating's (2000, 2003, 2006, 2008b) work.

[65] See Table 4, Appendix 1, Statistical Annexe, National Report on Australian Schooling 2005 (MCEETYA 2009).

However, there are continuing pressures on the senior school certificates to respond to a range of demands such as increasing school participation and retention, and the increased diversity of students and post-school pathways. All States now include VET-in-schools as part of the senior school certificates, although the States differ in the extent to which they include VET-in-schools as part of the tertiary entrance rank. Most secondary schools now offer VET-in-schools and almost 34 per cent of senior secondary school students are enrolled in VET as part of their senior school certificate (NCVER 2008a, Table 1). VET-in-schools mostly consists of VET certificates I and II, and there have been concerns over the quality of this provision (Polesel 2008). School-based apprenticeships, where students commence an apprenticeship while undertaking their senior school certificate, are also available to students. The numbers are still small (but growing) – 17,000 commencements in the 12 months before 31 March 2007 (ABS 2008b, p. 384).

The Australian Government is increasing its control over school education. Australia now conducts national literacy and numeracy tests commencing in the early years of school. Students' achievements are measured and ranked and, as part of the Government's commitment to 'transparency', information will be published about individual school results and how the school compared to 'similar' schools, as well as information about the student population (Gillard 2008, 2009a). The Australian Government is also establishing a national curriculum board to develop a national curriculum for all levels of school education, initially in key learning areas such as English, mathematics, the sciences and history (ABS 2008b, p. 378).

Summary

Government policies are contributing to blurring the sectoral divide in two ways. First, the Australian Government is establishing the 'architecture' that is required for a coherent tertiary education system based on stronger regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for all sectors. This includes:

- the structuring of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations so that higher education and VET are within the same 'group';
- a 'strengthened' AQF;
- a ministerial council for tertiary education;
- a new regulatory body for higher education that will eventually include VET; and
- more consistent student fees through the extension of income-contingent loans to some VET qualifications; a process that will undoubtedly be extended.

Second, Government policies that seek to create markets in education are contributing to the blurring of the sectoral divide. The educational sectors are increasingly defined by the qualifications that are accredited in each sector and not by the type of institutions that comprise those sectors, even though most institutions are still defined by their primary sectoral location. Many of Australia's 37 public universities are registered to offer VET qualifications, or have established companies to do so (Karmel 2009b), and now ten TAFE are registered to offer higher education programmes (Wheelahan et al. 2009). As explained above, most schools now offer VET as part of their senior school

certificates. To add to the complexity, the number of private providers in VET and higher education has grown considerably over recent years to be a small, if growing, part of both sectors, and many of these institutions offer both VET and higher education qualifications (Watson 2000).

However, while these policies and market pressures are contributing to blurring sectoral divides, there are still important contradictions. First, the Government will not allow public universities to offer full-fee under-graduate programmes to domestic students, but the public provider in VET (TAFE) is expected to increase its proportion of full-fee students and income.[66] The 'market' that is being constructed in each sector differs. This is perhaps a transient contradiction. More important is the insistence that VET qualifications be competency-based in an 'industry-led' system, while schools and higher education have an input-based model of curriculum.

4. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

This section first outlines the origins of the AQF. It explores the *intrinsic* and *institutional* logics that shaped its development (Raffe et al. 1994). The structure of the AQF is then outlined, and this includes a discussion of student articulation between the sectors, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning (RPL). Following this is an evaluation of the AQF. The Appendix at the end of this chapter contains a list of dates and events in the evolution of tertiary education in Australia.

Origins of the AQF: Intrinsic and institutional logics

The AQF was introduced in 1995 and phased in over five years. Keating (2000) says that a qualifications framework has three broad purposes. It aims to:

- establish equivalence and links between qualifications in articulation, credit transfer, pathways and 'seamlessness', by ensuring that qualifications are recognized by different jurisdictions and stakeholders;

- be a mechanism of quality control, encompassing quality assurance, user confidence in the system, and funding; and,

- achieve coherence between general and vocational streams, the aim of which is to provide a basis for measurement and comparison of outcomes, and to provide the basis for embedding key or core skills.

This describes the 'intrinsic logic' of qualifications frameworks – the rationale upon which NQFs are justified or supported independently of the 'context in which the reform might be implemented' (Young 2003, p. 201). However, reforms are always mediated by the economic and social interests of different constituencies as well as the construction of sectors and the institutions

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[66] I am not condoning markets and full fees in education here, just pointing to an inconsistency in policy.

within them – Raffe et al. (1994) refer to this as the institutional logic of reforms.

The institutional logics had a powerful impact on the nature of the AQF and its subsequent development. A key driver shaping the AQF which it shared with NQFs in other countries was to develop a national VET system (DEST 2003, p. 12; Tuck 2007). This is expressed in one of the AQF's objectives which is to '...encourage the provision of more and higher quality vocational education and training through qualifications that normally meet workplace requirements and vocational needs, thus contributing to national economic performance'. There is no parallel AQF objective to establish national coherence to qualifications in higher education and the senior secondary qualifications in the different States. This reflects the influence of institutional logic, specifically the relative autonomy of the universities and powerful stakeholders in the senior secondary school systems (Keating 2003). It also explains why the AQF mainly applies to the VET sector. When the national VET system was established in the 1990s, business and unions shaped the structure and governance of the system, and the nature of qualifications as competency-based. Industry interests shaped the structure of the AQF. For example, Keating (2006, p. 65) explains that:

> … a decision was made in 2002 to take out any mention of 'levels' in the description of the framework. This was made under pressure from the business sector to ensure that qualification levels could not be linked to industrial awards, and thus acknowledged the AQF's major and arguably only tangible function: that of a set of descriptors for assembling VET qualifications from the industry derived units of competency.

However, even though the AQF mainly applies to the VET sector, the higher education sector has been influential in shaping its structure and in maintaining the sectoral differentiation between VET and higher education. Associate degrees – two-year degrees – were added to the AQF in 2004 as *higher education* qualifications, even though the key statutory body with authority for VET argued at the time that they should be both a higher education and a VET qualification. Furthermore, key stakeholders in VET argued that graduate diplomas and graduate certificates should be VET qualifications as well as higher education qualifications. The peak body for universities opposed this, but it 'supported' VET in 'developing and accrediting its own separately-titled awards' (DEST 2003), and so *VET* graduate diplomas and certificates were added to the AQF in 2005.

This helps to explain why the AQF is a 'loose' qualifications framework with weak regulatory functions without many of the features of NQFs elsewhere, such as taxonomy of learning outcomes, explicit levels and a measure of volume (or time) of learning.

Structure and design of the AQF and outcomes

This section outlines the origins of the AQF, its structure, the purposes it was designed to achieve, and its relationship to each of the sectors. The AQF was established in 1995 and it lists all qualifications that are accredited in the senior schools, VET and higher education sectors respectively. The AQF replaced the 'Major National Tertiary Course Award levels established by the Register of Australian Tertiary Education' (Goozee 2001, p. 88).

The AQF website says that the AQF '...is a quality assured national framework of qualifications'.[67] Its objectives are, among other things, to promote pathways, credit transfer and articulation between sectors, and between work and life experience and qualifications through recognition of prior learning, and to promote 'national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Australia' (AQFAB 2007, p. 2). When the AQF was established, there were 12 qualifications, but there are now 15 with the addition of associate degrees in 2004 and VET graduate diplomas and certificates in 2005 (ibid.).

Table 2.   Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

Schools sector	VET sector	HE sector	
		Doctoral degrees	
		Masters degrees	
	VET Graduate diploma	Graduate diploma	
	VET Graduate certificate	Graduate certificate	
		Bachelor degree	
	Advanced diploma	Advanced diploma	Associate degree
	Diploma	Diploma	
	Certificate IV		
	Certificate III		
Senior Secondary Certificates of education	Certificate II		
	Certificate I		

The AQF consists of broad 'characteristics of learning outcomes' for each qualification, but it does not have a taxonomy of learning outcomes. It generally indicates how long it would take to do a senior school certificate or a higher education qualification, but has no measure of time for VET qualifications (because they are based on competency-outcomes). Each sector and jurisdiction is responsible for programme development, accreditation and quality assurance, and this is indicated in the AQF which specifies the 'authority for learning

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[67] This is how the new AQF Council describes the AQF. See the AQF website: http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/TheAQF/tabid/108/Default.aspxAQF [22 Nov. 2009]. In contrast, under the previous AQF Advisory Board, the AQF was described as 'a *unified system* of national qualifications' (emphasis added), and this was the description on the AQF website as recently as 15 June 2009 http://www.aqf.edu.au/aboutaqf.htm [15 June 2009].

outcomes' for each sector. It also indicates how pathways can be used to achieve each qualification and undertake further study, and in this way establishes relationships between qualifications (for example, diplomas, advanced diplomas or associate degrees can lead to a degree). However, as discussed above, while it establishes relationships between qualifications, it specifically does not specify 'levels'. The 'authority for learning outcomes' for VET explain that VET qualifications 'are based on nationally endorsed competency standards' in which achievement of learning outcomes are 'identified as sets of competencies for levels of workplace performance' (AQFAB 2007, p. 6). In contrast, the 'authority for learning outcomes' for schools and higher education do not specify the nature of curriculum, only the stakeholders who are involved in developing outcomes. The AQF is also supported by:

- national guidelines on cross-sectoral links, which among other things, provides advice about the 'quantum' of credit for VET qualifications in higher education qualifications; and[68]

- national principles and operational guidelines for RPL.[69]

There are, in addition, two sets of MCEETYA principles to support credit transfer from VET to higher education. These are:

- Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation; and,

- Principles for Good Practice Information Provision on Credit Transfer and Articulation from VTE [VET] to higher education. [70]

Outcomes: Educational pathways

The data are deeply problematic and subject to much debate. This arises in part because the sectors fund, count and report students differently, and much of the data on credit transfer and prior study history is based on student self-report (Curtis 2009; Moodie 2004). However, the following outcomes are observed.

- Most student transfer or articulation occurs *within* educational sectors (Curtis 2009).

- In 2007, approximately 10 per cent of students were admitted to higher education on the basis of a prior VET qualification, with the dual-sector

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[68] For these guidelines see:
http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/Pathways/Crosssectorqualificationlinkages/tabid/157/Default.aspx [22 Nov. 2009].

[69] For the RPL principles and guidelines see:
http://www.aqf.edu.au/AbouttheAQF/Pathways/RecognitionofPriorLearningRPLpathway/tabid/158/Default.aspx [22 Nov. 2009].

[70] For these guidelines see:
http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/Documents/Credit%20Transfer%20Project%20-%20Final%20draft%20policy.pdf [22 Nov. 2009].

universities admitting the highest percentage of students (17.4 per cent), and the elite universities the fewest (2.7 per cent) (Wheelahan 2009c).[71]

- Around 3.4 per cent of higher education students were awarded credit or exemptions based on their prior VET studies in 2006.

- The 'basis of admission' underestimates the percentage of students with prior TAFE qualifications in higher education because not all VET students are admitted on the basis of their VET qualification, and it does not take into account students' multiple enrolments in both sectors (Moodie 2005a). Moodie's (idem, p. 3) research shows that 25 per cent of commencing under-graduate students and 19 per cent of commencing post-graduate students in 2003 had studied in TAFE, while Curtis (2009, p. 4) shows that 16 per cent of under-graduate commencing higher education students in 2007 reported a VET award as their highest qualification.

- VET diplomas and advanced diplomas provide an important pathway to higher education for young people aged under 25 years. Some 32 per cent of students aged under 25 in 2003 who completed a VET diploma or above went on to study a degree, as did around 14 per cent of graduates aged 25 years and over. In some fields of education such as banking and accountancy, over 50 per cent of VET diploma graduates aged under 25 years go on to study at degree (Stanwick 2006, pp. 31-32).

- Enrolments in VET diplomas and advanced diplomas are static and in some areas have declined in recent years (Karmel 2008b), and this may be a restraint on the volume of student transfer from VET to higher education because the diploma is the main qualification that students use to make this transition.

- Most students who seek admission to degrees based on a VET diploma/advanced diploma find one, and they are offered places at university at a similar rate to other categories of applicants. This may be a reflection of Australia's strong economy and relatively weak demand for tertiary education, and it will be important to ensure that VET articulators continue to be provided with access as demand for higher education places increases now that the economy is weak (Wheelahan 2009c, p. 8).

- VET to higher education student transfers are becoming more important, but there is no substantive national policy to support these transfers. Most young people who transfer from higher education to VET do so because they have not completed their degree and they enrol in VET programmes in the same broad field of study. Older students who transfer from higher education to VET have often finished their degree and are often seeking a VET qualification in a different area (Curtis 2009).

- About 3.4 per cent of all successful subject enrolments in VET in 2007 were achieved on the basis of RPL. This is quite low given the central importance placed on RPL by governments and the fact that the AQTF makes it mandatory for all RTOs to offer RPL to individuals upon enrolment (NCVER 2008c, Table 13). The data on RPL in higher education are not recent and they were collected on a different basis to VET, however, in 2001 the percentage of higher

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[71] Swinburne University of Technology, a dual-sector university, admitted the highest percentage of students on the basis of prior VET studies – 27 per cent in 2007.

education students reporting that they received some RPL was minimal (Wheelahan et al. 2002). In both sectors, those students who receive the most RPL are older; study higher-level qualifications; are already in work; and have the considerable knowledge and skills that are needed to navigate the RPL process.

Outcomes: qualifications and employment

The data concerning the relationship between qualifications and employment outcomes are limited. However, as discussed earlier, there is not a good 'fit' between qualifications and the occupations for which they are intended, with the exception of regulated occupations where the fit is tighter (Karmel et al. 2008, p. 19). Unlike northern European countries which use agreements between social partners to regulate the match between supply and demand, in Australia the match between supply and demand is regulated through the market. The research is limited, but Ridoutt et al. (2005a, b) show that while employers value qualifications as proxies for knowledge and skills, they value experience more highly in many of their business decisions.

Larger employers were more likely to value qualifications than smaller employers, as did those who were required to meet regulatory requirements. In a small-scale research project, Ridoutt et al. (2005b, p. 7) say that 'While 90 per cent of the respondent employers valued qualifications in managing at least one risk in their enterprise, less than 25 per cent value qualifications unconditionally.' In other research, Ridoutt et al. (2005a, p. 11) say that employers do not value qualifications in the same way as does the VET sector: 'The approach taken to "qualifications" by enterprise managers is generally to seek recognition only of a small number of competencies, not a whole Australian Qualifications Framework qualification.' In other words, there are no data that can demonstrate that the introduction of the AQF has directly raised the qualifications level of the workforce. The relationship between the two is more indirect and, while important, it is only one component of broader educational and employment policies and the way these are mediated by educational institutions, professional bodies, industry associations, unions, employers, and government. Of particular importance is the extent to which government regulates occupational requirements, as this leads to higher numbers with qualifications in those areas.

Frameworks to support pathways

A range of frameworks and models has emerged to support the development of pathways between the sectors. PhillipsKPA (2006c, p. 3) report that the trend is '... towards developing more systematic models both within institution-to-institution partnerships and in multi-institutional arrangements.' The State Governments have been active to varying degrees in promoting cross-sectoral collaboration that lead to pathways. Several State Governments have instituted State-wide approaches to credit transfer by developing memoranda of understanding between TAFE at the State level and universities collectively or with individual universities in their State, and by publicizing information about pathways on websites (PhillipsKPA 2006b, p. 85). All levels of government have funded projects to facilitate greater co-operation and pathways between institutions in both sectors, and to promote resource sharing.

The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) has developed a 'credit-matrix' to facilitate credit transfer in that state. It contains a taxonomy of learning across three domains (knowledge and skills; application; and degree of independence), levels, and points for the amount of learning involved. Unlike the AQF which is sector specific, the descriptors and levels in the credit matrix were designed to encompass all sectors (Noonan et al. 2004). It operates at the level of subjects and modules and not whole qualifications (as is the case with the AQF) (Noonan 2003). Its purpose is to facilitate pathways and credit transfer between qualifications, and courses that are submitted for accreditation or re-accreditation '...should include Credit Matrix levels and points in the accreditation submission'.[72] By using the credit matrix to assign a position to all subjects in qualifications within the matrix, its use is extended beyond a tool that can be used by educators to mediate their discussions. Arguably, this is where it has most value. Otherwise, it adds a level of complexity to the development of qualifications that may not be particularly helpful because it is premised on the assumption that subjects, units or modules can and should be considered independently of the qualifications of which they are part.

Strengths and weaknesses

The AQF has been successful in a number of key areas. These can be summarized as follows:

- It has helped create a national VET system out of the pre-existing State-based disparate and fragmented VET systems.

- It has near-universal coverage of post-compulsory education qualifications and has controlled the proliferation of different qualifications which would have added great complexity to sectoral provision and created difficulties for businesses, parents and students in understanding qualifications.

- It has a high level of acceptance within the sectors, partly because the sectors 'own' their qualifications within the AQF, but this is at 'the cost of some discontinuity and inconsistency' (Keating 2008b, p. 10).

- It has contributed to providing national consistency to VET and higher education qualifications, while it has been less successful in doing so with senior school certificates.

- It is well regarded internationally and this has contributed to the high standing of Australian qualifications internationally.

- It has, to a limited extent, provided the basis for dialogue between the sectors and been used to underpin credit transfer agreements and pathways even though the perception in government is that this has not gone far enough.

- It has avoided the problems of some other NQFs as a consequence of its distributed ownership, accreditation and quality assurance arrangements (Keating 2008b).

[72] VRQA Credit Matrix website: http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/cmatrix/design.htm [15 June 2009].

There are, however, considerable weaknesses. Rather than being a unified system of national qualifications, it is, as Tuck (2007, p. 21) points out, more characteristic of a linked NQF rather than a universal one. The current AQFC (2009, p. 7) consultation paper goes further and says that 'some commentators' have suggested that the AQF is effectively three separate frameworks, with one for each sector. It argues that it has fallen behind international developments, is slow to accommodate changing circumstances, doesn't assist credit and articulation across sectors, 'contains descriptors that are considered inadequate and conciliatory', and has had minimal impact in the schools and higher education sectors (idem).

The AQF's credit transfer and RPL guidelines and MCEETYA's 'good practice' credit transfer principles are not prescriptive and operate more at the level of 'good suggestions', particularly for universities, which are self-accrediting and are therefore free to determine if, when and how they will provide credit for VET qualifications. VET providers are more compelled to comply because VET policy insists on credit transfer and RPL, but this is mainly *within* VET and does not incorporate credit transfer for students moving from higher education to VET. Universities are required to report to government on their credit transfer and articulation policies as part of their annual reporting and this puts them under some pressure to demonstrate they have such policies, but this is not onerous.

Arguably, the AQF contributes to *entrenching* sectoral differences, because, even where qualifications are shared by the VET and higher education sectors – as is the case with diplomas and advanced diplomas – and even though they have the same broad learning outcome, they are 'different' because:

> … there are no standardised rankings or equivalences between different qualifications issued in different sectors, as these qualifications recognise different types of learning reflecting the distinctive educational responsibilities of each sector. Where the same qualifications are issued in more than one sector but authorised differently by each sector (ie Diploma, Advanced Diploma) they are equivalent qualifications, although sector-differentiated. (AQFAB 2007, p. 2)

In other words, the sectors' qualifications are differentiated from each other by the principle of difference. VET qualifications are based on 'outputs' that sever learning outcomes from institutions and processes of learning whereas higher education qualifications are based on 'inputs' and are process driven. The AQF states that the objectives and academic requirements of higher education qualifications are 'set by higher education institutions having regard for requirements set by peer review and the requirements of relevant professional bodies and employer groups' (idem, p. 7). That is, they are developed through shared understandings of stakeholders about the syllabus, processes of learning and assessment and outcomes.

The tensions between equivalence and difference and between inputs and outputs within the AQF are not recognized in policy. In 2005, all Commonwealth and State education and training ministers endorsed a set of 'good practice' principles for credit transfer from VET to higher education. These principles clearly assume that learning outcomes can be determined independently of processes of learning. The first principle says that credit transfer and articulation is used to establish 'equivalence of learning outcomes' that are 'regardless of the similarity or differences of the education processes', which includes 'delivery,

teaching methodology and assessment' or type of provider delivering the qualification (MCEETYA 2005).

5.   The future 'stronger' AQF

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the new AQF will almost certainly be based on a taxonomy of learning outcomes, explicit levels and a measure of volume (or time) of learning. However, it is not clear that this will be able to resolve the contradiction at the heart of tertiary education in Australia unless it confronts the dilemmas that arise from:

▪   an AQF based on the principle of similarity when its sectors of education are based on the principle of difference;

▪   VET qualifications that are based on 'outputs' while school and higher education qualifications are based on 'inputs'.

It is not clear that this is regarded as a problem for the AQF. The AQFC is, at the Minister's directive, undertaking research on how competence-based qualifications and merit-based higher education qualifications can be better 'aligned'. This is in addition to an AQFC project that has been developing a 'common language' that the sectors can use in developing 'seamlessness'. It does not seem that the differences between the sectors are regarded as substantive.

Keating (2008b, p. 8) explains that an NQF 'is unlikely to be neutral on the two central questions for qualifications – the nature of the knowledge (including skills) that they represent, and the nature of the learning that has led to the knowledge.' The current proposal in the AQFC consultation paper will have different consequences depending on whether the surrounding policy results in a tight or loose framework. The different domains of learning can be understood as broad guides that can be used to structure relationships between qualifications and to guide discussion between the sectors, or they can be used to tightly specify the nature of qualifications and change the nature of learning outcomes by insisting that qualifications be derived from these outcomes. The latter has the effect of severing learning outcomes from institutions, pedagogy and syllabi. However, learning outcomes cannot be considered independently of these processes because the outcomes are determined by these processes. To insist that this should be so, results in endless processes of specification that fragment knowledge and the access that students have to knowledge (Allais 2006, 2007a, 2007b). This is reflected most strongly in competency-based training which provides students with access to contextually-specific knowledge as it is applied at work, but not the disciplinary system of meaning in which that knowledge is embedded (Wheelahan 2009a).

An AQF with levels will help to establish clearer relationships between qualifications and provide the basis for a 'climbing framework' (David, 1997, p. viii) and notions of 'time' will help to establish notions of broadly commensurable learning 'effort' between qualifications at the same level and at different levels. This would make it easier, for example, to raise doubts about the quality of diplomas that are normally meant to be delivered in a year being delivered in three months; or a two-year masters delivered in one year or even six months. Both levels and time will help establish fair and defensible levels of credit between qualifications. This too can be tight or loose with different consequences arising from each. If it is part of a loose framework, it can be

understood as providing broad guides about how qualifications can be structured and the relationships between qualifications and levels of credit. For example, it would be commonly understood that advanced diplomas may provide access to a VET graduate diploma or certificate, but that it should not provide credit towards the latter because these qualifications are meant to be at a 'higher level' of complexity and depth. It would provide the basis for discussions about the relationship between degrees and graduate diplomas and certificates. Many graduate diplomas and certificates (and even some coursework masters) are arguably repackaged under-graduate degrees that are being used to provide degree graduates with access to a different field. Other graduate diplomas and certificates have higher demands and higher levels of complexity.

The notion of levels also implies that progression from a qualification at one level to another level on the framework will be based on educational attributes, not competences demonstrated in the workplace or a simulated workplace as is currently required for VET qualifications.

The current AQFC (2009, p. 23) consultation paper provides an 'indicative example' to demonstrate the way in which levels and time can be linked in qualifications, so that, for example, a certificate IV may have 90-150 credit points (based on notional hours of learning) 'with at least x per cent of the final level of this qualification'. This indicates that it may be part of a tighter framework. There are two problems with this approach: first, a qualification can only be understood *relationally* by the way in which all its elements relate to each other (Keating 2008b). Insisting on how the qualification is to be made up does not take account of the differences between disciplinary fields or professional and occupational areas. The second problem is that it reduces a qualification to the sum of its parts and contributes to fragmented notions of learning. It is argued that this is necessary to support credit accumulation and credit transfer. However, the cost is too great and is unnecessary. Moodie (2008) has shown that many States in the United States have higher levels of student transfer from community colleges (the analogues of TAFE) to elite universities than does Australia, and this often occurs with specified credit. This takes place in the absence of a qualifications framework but in the context of policy 'breadth', where State legislatures pass policies that insist on these outcomes.

Qualifications will be valued only if they are trusted by those who use them and not by what they say a person can do or knows (Young 2003, p. 208). Coles and Oates (2005, p. 12) argue that student pathways, credit transfer and articulation can only be built on 'zones of mutual trust' (ZMTs) which comprise agreements between key players about the quality, standard and outcomes of qualifications.[73] They explain that ZMTs 'exist through the behaviour of people who are participating in them, operating through, or anticipating, common values and concerns. ZMTs cannot be imposed, they are dependent on processes of consensus and on voluntary participation' (idem, p. 13). Raffe (2005, p. 36) says these zones are based on agreements that result in specific learning outcomes (such as qualifications) to be automatically accepted and credited by another institution or sector and can be at the level of a discipline, institution or network.

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[73] See Raffe (2005) and Hart (2005) on ZMTs. Michael Young (2003) uses the notion of 'communities of trust' as the basis of the credibility of qualifications.

He says that 'the existence of an agreed credit system can make negotiations on such zones easier' (idem).

A revised AQF can contribute to these relationships or it can seek to substitute itself for them. The issue of trust and qualifications has not been sufficiently explored in the literature and Young and Allais (2009) emphasize that the issue of trust cannot be evaded. Levels of credit and student transfer are higher when there is trust between institutions (PhillipsKPA 2006a). Such trust is based on confidence in teaching, learning processes, syllabi and assessment and not independently of these. Consequently, it does not make sense to talk of credit transfer and articulation between sectors in outcomes-based systems independently of 'inputs' when the trust needed to establish such arrangements is based precisely on those inputs. Minimal levels of credit transfer may take place based purely on outcomes and result in credit transfer agreements that have been 'bolted on' to qualifications, but it is unlikely to result in coherent and supported pathways developed holistically within complementary programmes that maximize credit and support student learning.

A loose framework that is owned and distributed through the sectors in which the purpose is to act as an enabling framework is more likely to achieve these outcomes than a strong, regulatory framework for pedagogic reasons and because such a framework cannot win the support that it needs from all sectors of education as has been demonstrated in New Zealand and South Africa (Tuck 2007; Young and Allais 2009). It could also provide the basis of moving towards a more consistent approach in the purpose and nature of qualifications across the sectors so that they are not so differentiated and thus overcome the tension between difference and similarity. In this way, it could provide the basis for a conversation about the way in which qualifications mediate access to the knowledge and skills needed for citizenship and participation in society more broadly, as well as for work.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix: Key dates and events in Australia

Date	What happened
1965	Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) established as a separate higher education sector (Martin 1964). Sectoral funding and policies henceforth determined on the basis that the Commonwealth had responsibility for higher education (particularly funding), while the State Governments had responsibility for everything else. Sectoral policies designed to avoid 'cost-shifting' from one level of government to the other, thus entrenching sectoral differences.
1974	Report of the 'Kangan Committee' led to the recognition of TAFE (Technical and Further Education) by the Commonwealth as a national tertiary education sector. Its funding and administration was still primarily a responsibility of State Governments, although Commonwealth funding for TAFE starts to increase. The Kangan Committee 'provided the philosophical and policy basis for the development of a distinctive identity for the technical and further education system in Australia' (Anderson 1998, p. 3). The Kangan Committee (1974, p. xxvi) defined TAFE broadly to include vocational preparation, and education that led to the development of the person 'as a member of society, including the development of non vocational and social skills that affect personality'.
1977	Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) established which brought the Universities Council, the Advanced Education Council and the Technical and Further Education Council (TAPEC) together as sub-councils under the CTEC umbrella (Goozee 2001).
1975-82	Period of growth for TAFE as Kangan Committee recommendations were implemented, along with greater investment in capital and recurrent funding. TAFE's 'golden age' (idem, p. 38).
Late 1970s & early 1980s	Labour market programmes established which aimed to reduce the unemployment rate for 15-19 year olds (idem, p. 53).
Mid-1980s	Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury, Finance, Industry Technology and Commerce, and Science start to take an interest in tertiary education and in aligning higher education and TAFE with the economy and employment outcomes.
1987	Australia Reconstructed published. It was a joint publication of the Australian Council for Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Trade Development Council based on a joint mission they had undertaken to Western Europe. Its emphasis was on skills and the role of education in making Australia more productive and competitive internationally, and in aligning training reform with industry restructuring. It is a key touchstone for reforms that followed.
1988	The 'Dawkins' reforms commence – John Dawkins was the Labor Minister for Employment, Education and Training. This included: ▪ creation of a unified *university* sector through merging universities and colleges of advanced education; ▪ TAFE strongly oriented to training for work and subordinated to the economy. Dawkins issues a paper that says that TAFE needs to move from a 'time-served' system to a competency-based system, and that it needs to focus more on industry-based formal training (idem, p. 67).
1988	The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) was introduced in universities. It is an income-contingent loan for students to pay fees (which were regulated by government). The fees that students are required to pay are increased in ensuing

Date	What happened
	years.
1988	National Board for Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) established which included four councils: ■ The Schools Council; ■ The Higher Education Council; ■ The Employment and Skills Formation Council (ESFC); ■ The Australian Research Council. Goozee (idem, p. 65) says 'Although NBEET and its councils seemed to have adequate representation from the higher education and schools sector, representation from the TAFE sector was noticeably lacking.' Unlike CTEC, which had statutory powers, NBEET's role was purely advisory, which was 'clearly an assertion of ministerial power' (idem, p. 69). NBEET survives until the end of 1998 when it was dismantled by the Conservative Australian Government (NBEET was established by a Labor Government). Apart from the AQF (which was established in 1995) there is now no body with responsibility for advising government on cross-sectoral issues. NBEET had produced a number of research reports on the desirability of student articulation and credit-transfer.
1990	The National Training Board (NTB) is established with responsibility for developing and endorsing national competency standards. At this stage, competency-based training (CBT) is linked to industry classifications in occupations and industry awards and industrial agreements (idem, p. 68). This link between CBT and industrial awards and agreements was severed when the Conservative Commonwealth Government came to power in 1996 so that it could not be used as a bargaining chip in industrial award negotiations, although the link between occupations and CBT was maintained.
1990-92	Commonwealth and State Governments agree to establish the **'National Framework for the Recognition of Training' (NFROT).** Its purpose was to provide a national framework to accredit VET courses, determine credit-transfer between them, and for RPL and assessment of competencies (idem, p. 81). This laid the basis for the national recognition of VET qualifications and for CBT as the basis of VET qualifications.
1991	The Finn report calls for higher levels of school retention, greater alignment between education and work and key competencies (idem, p. 81).
1992	The Mayer Committee report defines 'key competencies' as necessary for work, but also 'for effective participation in further education and adult life more generally' (cited in Goozee 2001, p. 82). These are revised in the mid-2000s in VET as 'employability skills' and are more tightly tied to enterprises and the workplace.
1992	The Carmichael Report recommends establishment of 'a competency-based Australian Vocational Certificate System' (idem, p. 83).
1992–94	Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating, threatens to set up his own national VET system in parallel to the States' VET systems if the states do not agree to a Commonwealth takeover of funding and control of TAFE (idem, p. 84). This stance was softened, and as a compromise, the *Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)* was established in 1994. ANTA was a partnership between the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory Governments, and it had its own ministerial council. It was based on the principle of 'co-operative federalism', which means that all levels of government putatively co-operated with each other in setting policy for VET. ANTA takes over responsibility for funding national *Industry Training Advisory Bodies* (ITABS).

Date	What happened
1993	*The National Competition Policy Report* (the Hilmer Report) is published, which recommends policies to create markets in all areas of public provision. Goozee (2001, p. 91) explains: 'Although legal advice from Commonwealth and State Attorney-generals concluded that VET did not come within the scope of national competition policy, it did have an impact on national and State VET policies, particularly the putting of public funds out to tender.' Policies that establish VET as a market are further developed in the years that follow.
1993-95	Australian and State Government Education Ministers agree to the establishment of the ***Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)***, which was established in 1995. The AQF lists all qualifications that are accredited in the senior schools, VET and higher education sectors respectively. The AQF replaced the 'Major National Tertiary Course Award levels established by the Register of Australian Tertiary Education' (idem, p. 88). When the AQF was established, there were 12 qualifications but there are now 15 with the addition of associate degrees as higher education qualifications in 2004 and VET graduate diplomas and certificates in 2005 (AQFAB 2007).
1996	Australian and State Education Ministers agree to establish the **National Training System** which replaces NFROT*.* It had two main components: ***Training Packages,*** which consisted of qualifications based on units of competency, and the ***Australian Recognition Framework***, which guaranteed national recognition of all competency outcomes in training packages at all VET institutions by all other VET institutions throughout the country, and specified the criteria VET providers were required to meet in delivering and assessing VET qualifications. TAFE more clearly starts to become one 'provider' in a broader, marketized VET system that includes private providers.
1997	The first ***Training Packages*** are introduced and become the mandated model of VET qualifications in Australia.
2000	The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which includes all relevant ministers from the Australian and State and Territory Governments, endorses the MCEETYA ***National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes***. These are updated in 2006. They include principles, criteria and processes for: ▪ registering non-university higher-education providers and accrediting their courses; ▪ awarding self-accrediting authority to non-university higher-education providers; ▪ establishing new universities; and, ▪ approving overseas higher-education institutions seeking to operate in Australia.
2000	The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is established. Its purpose is to: 'promote, audit, and report on quality assurance in Australian higher education'.
2001	The Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) in VET is replaced by the ***Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF),*** which is revised in 2005, and again in 2007. It was introduced in part in response to concerns about quality in the apprenticeship and traineeship systems in the States. It contained standards that VET institutions were required to meet to become 'Registered Training Organisations' (RTOs), and standards that the State Training and Accreditation Authorities were required to meet in registering training organizations (Smith and Keating 2003, p. 48).
2003	ITABS are replaced by **Industry Skills Councils** (ISCs), which have responsibility for developing training packages.
2005	ANTA is dismantled by the Conservative Australian Government based on principles of uncooperative federalism, and responsibilities of ANTA are administered through the (then) Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). A new ministerial council is established to oversee national coordination of VET – the

Date	What happened
	Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE). The conservative government implements the **National Skills Framework,** which replaces the National Training Framework, with the key elements (training packages and the AQTF) still in place, and the national governance and administrative arrangements are strengthened in favour of the Commonwealth and marketization principles in VET are further developed.
2007	The conservative government is defeated in national elections after 11 years of conservative rule and replaced by a Labor Government.
2008	The Australian Government undertakes the Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review). Many of the recommendations are adopted, and they have far reaching consequences for VET. They include the creation of a new ministerial council called the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE). MCTEE replaces MCVTE. It has responsibility for all tertiary education which includes VET, higher education, adult and community education, international education and the AQF. The Government will establish a new Tertiary Education Standards and Quality Authority which will first have responsibility for higher education (by 2010) and then for VET (by 2013). The **AQF Council** is established in 2008 and a review is undertaken to develop a more 'robust' AQF. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which consists of the Prime Minister and all the Premiers, who are the elected leaders of the States and Territories, develop 'human capital' reforms, and in many ways supplant MCTEE as the decisión-making body for VET. The Australian Government decides to implement a student voucher for higher education by 2012, and is, together with the States through COAG, trying to put 'fully contestable market' arrangements in place for VET. The Victorian State Government introduces a student voucher for its higher-level VET programmes which students can redeem at public or private VET institutions, and it plans to extend these to lower-level VET qualifications. It is likely that most States will follow similar arrangements over time.

Chapter 5: The changing faces of the South African National Qualifications Framework
- Stephanie Allais

1. Introduction

The NQF in South Africa was an attempt to address the educational, social, and economic problems caused by apartheid. While qualifications frameworks seem to be driven by similar concerns in many countries around the world, the extreme inequality of the South African education system under apartheid, as well as the extreme social and economic inequality in South Africa, the inefficiencies of the economy inherited from apartheid, as well as its rapid liberalization after re-entry into the global economy, made the NQF take on extraordinary significance in South Africa (Allais 2007b; Mukora 2006).

It has been seen internationally as one of the most, if not *the* most, ambitious qualifications frameworks. It aimed to replace all existing qualifications in the country with a set of new qualifications designed by new structures; this was intended to ensure the overhaul of all learning programmes and curricula. At the same time, it was hoped to lead to new provision and new institutions, as well as to many individuals getting qualifications based on knowledge and skills that they already had. Its designers and supporters hoped that by getting groups of stakeholders to create new qualifications and unit standards (part qualifications) consisting of learning outcomes, a qualifications framework could contribute to solving educational, social, and economic problems.

Support for the NQF at its inception was described as "extraordinary" (Manganyi 1996, p. 5). Unfortunately, despite its noble and unquestionably worthy goals, its implementation has been fraught with problems. Shortly after implementation got underway, contestation and criticisms emerged (Allais 2003; Ensor 2003; Muller 2000; Breier 1998). A review was commissioned in 2001 by the two departments responsible for the NQF: the Departments of Education and Labour. The report of this review refers to a "broad malaise of discontent with SAQA and the NQF" (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002, p. 143) and highlights the frustrations of many involved in implementation, the alienation caused by the proliferation of jargon, the perceptions of a burgeoning bureaucracy, and general confusion. However, the changes proposed by the review were not made official, and a few years later, the Departments of Education and Labour produced another document, with different proposed changes. These again did not become policy. After a long period without resolution, in 2008 a new Act was passed, which substantially changed the NQF as well as the organizations responsible for it. It is possible that it might be about to be changed yet again, before these changes have even been implemented.

While on paper its objectives remain the same, the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) states that "Early ambitious views of the NQF have been replaced by more modest views of NQFs as frameworks of communication that grow incrementally" (Isaacs 2009).

The story of how the NQF developed is complicated and contested. There are various accounts of the complex structures which were created, the complex relationships and power dynamics that emerged and played out, and different analyses of its problems as well as its strengths and weaknesses. It has inspired a series of PhD studies and academic publications, as well as lengthy commentaries and analyses. This short case study cannot claim to capture the details and nuances of the NQF to the satisfaction of a South African audience. However, the South African NQF has been influential within Southern Africa and elsewhere (Chisholm 2005), and it continues to be seen as an important qualifications

framework internationally. This study, therefore, aims to provide a description and analysis of the design and implementation of the South African NQF, discuss some of the problems which were experienced, and briefly speculate about some lessons that can be learnt from the South African experience. It is drawn primarily from published research as well as official documents. In a few instances I have drawn from my reflections and experiences as a participant in the unfolding policy drama.

Structure of the chapter

The following section provides the background and context. Section 3 then explains the origins of the NQF in South Africa. Section 4 discusses the design and implementation of the NQF, followed by Section 5 on the impact and achievements. Finally, Section 6 provides analysis and lessons.

2.   Background and context

By far the most important factor influencing the introduction of the NQF in South Africa is the legacy of apartheid, from the point of view of education, as well as broader social and economic questions. The apartheid legacy is important in understanding why the NQF took on such significance in South Africa, but also, in understanding the persisting problems of the South African education system. The NQF was seen as part of the transition to democracy which was formally inaugurated with 1994 elections, following negotiations between the liberation movement and the apartheid government. The bulk of this section therefore explores apartheid and its legacy, after a brief introduction to some key features of South Africa as a country and its education system. However, notwithstanding the importance of understanding the context which influenced the South African NQF, as will be seen below, the design of the South African NQF was very similar to the New Zealand model, as well as the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in England and Wales. In other words - although the reasons for introducing the NQF are based in the apartheid legacy, the design was more a product of policy borrowing than a locally-designed policy to respond to local conditions.

South Africa[74]

Situated at the southern tip of Africa, the Republic of South Africa borders both the Atlantic and Indian oceans, and is bordered to the north by Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, to the east by Mozambique and Swaziland, and surrounds the tiny independent Kingdom of Lesotho. South Africa is known for its diversity in cultures, languages, and religious beliefs. Eleven official languages are recognized in its constitution, with English being the most commonly spoken language in official and commercial public life, but only the fifth most spoken home language. The population is estimated at about 47 million.

By UN classification, South Africa is a middle-income country with good resources, well-developed infrastructure, as well as strong financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport sectors. South Africa contributes 38 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and its nine largest cities alone account for about 24 per cent of Africa's GDP. However, these statistics may be misleading. South Africa also has the

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[74] Sources for this section are: http://www.gov.za [5 May 2009], http://www.southafrica.info [11 June 2009], http://www.worldbank.org [18 Mar. 2009], and http://www.undp.org [6 June 2009]. Figures from 2009.

dubious distinction of having the highest Gini coefficient in the world - in other words, the highest levels in inequality. Deeply-entrenched poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and loss of human dignity among the majority of the population coexist with economic wealth, scholastic achievements, and a 'first world' lifestyle on a par with the richest countries in Europe.

Forty-five per cent of South Africans live below the nationally-determined poverty line. The vast majority of people are poor. Unemployment levels are extremely high (between 25 and 45 per cent, depending on whose notion of unemployment is used). According to the United Nations Development Programme ((UNDP)'s development index, the probability of not surviving past age 40 is 31 per cent, the adult illiteracy rate is 17.6 per cent, 12 per cent of people do not have access to clean water, and 12 per cent of children are underweight for their age. South Africa is ranked 121 out of 177 countries by the UNDP Programme Human Development Index. South Africa also has very high levels of crime, particularly violent crime. HIV/AIDS levels are very high.

Apartheid gave rise to one of the most unequal and racially-segregated societies in the world. Although the democratic government which came to power in 1994 has overseen a comprehensive set of legal, political, economic, and social reforms, and South Africa has a widely-regarded progressive constitution and other legal frameworks, the legacy of apartheid has not been easy to deal with. Inequality remains pervasive and persistent because apartheid was not just a political process of disenfranchising the black majority, but it also denied them access to education, and systematically closed off or distorted their participation in the economy.

South Africa has many refugees from poorer neighbouring countries, including many immigrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and others, representing a large portion of the informal sector; although many of them are believed to be skilled and qualified.

South Africa is a popular tourist destination, and a substantial amount of revenue comes from tourism. South Africa also has a strong mining sector, as well as an automotive industry. Agriculture remains important, and chief exports include maize, fruits and vegetables, sugar, and wool. The South African rand is the most actively-traded emerging market currency in the world.

The South African education and training system

In 2007, there were 14,167,086 learners in formal education in South Africa, with 85 per cent being in public schools, 2.5 per cent in private schools, 761,087 in public higher education institutions, 320,679 in public further education institutions (vocational education), 292,734 in public adult learning centres, 289,312 in public early childhood development centres, and 102,057 in special schools (RSA Department of Education 2009). There are also large numbers of learners in private vocational institutions and workplace training, but official records are not available.

There are 26,065 schools in South Africa, the vast majority of which are public. Independent schools number 1,086. Officially, ten years of general education are free and compulsory in South Africa. What free education means in practice is that it is possible in theory to be exempted from school fees. Nearly all schools charge fees, with the recent exception of some of the poorest schools being declared fee-free. Many state schools charge fees much higher than some of the cheaper private schools, although there are also a small number of extremely expensive elite private schools. In practice, most people pay substantial fees and expenses relative to their income levels.

Nonetheless, educational enrollments in primary education are universal. Ninety-eight per cent of children complete grade 7. However, the quality of primary education is extremely varied, with the majority of schools being of poor quality, and South African learners performing very poorly in international tests, even relative to much poorer countries (Fleisch 2008). No qualification is currently issued at the end of junior secondary school, despite the fact that this is the end of free and compulsory education.

Large dropouts from the school system start to occur around year 10, and increase dramatically, so that the cohort that finishes senior secondary education is much smaller. For example, in 2007, the latest year for which detailed statistics are available, 1,171,323 children were enrolled in grade one. In the same year (in other words, not the same cohort, but the numbers are nevertheless indicative), 564,775 students wrote the final school examinations. Of those, 368,217 passed, in other words, obtained a Senior Certificate, although only 85,454 obtained the minimum requirements to be able to apply for university entrance (RSA Department of Education 2009).

At the end of secondary education, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is issued, on the basis of a national examination as well as a small component of school-based assessment. The certificate is issued by Umalusi (the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training), on the basis of examinations which are set by the Department of Education and a small Independent Examinations Board (which operates mainly in independent schools).

South Africa has 23 universities, including universities of technology (formally technikons). Some of these are well regarded internationally. Most of these universities have numerous campuses, as they are the product of mergers of the previously-divided apartheid universities. 127,154 students obtained degrees and diplomas from higher education institutions in 2007. Universities issue their own qualifications. There are also private and internationally-franchised universities and institutions offering post-school certificates - 77 institutions are listed as registered by the South African Government.[75]

There are 50 Further Education and Training (FET) colleges. These institutions overlap with the last three years of schooling (that is, senior secondary school), but also offer post-school level qualifications, although these are generally not considered higher education. Like the universities, these are multi-campus institutions, being the result of mergers of the over 150 institutions that used to exist. College qualifications are issued by Umalusi on the basis of examinations set by the Department of Education.

There are a large number of private providers in vocational education. These range from institutions offering international qualifications such as City and Guilds, to large distance education institutions, to individuals who offer customized training. Although efforts have been made to regulate this sector through a fledgling accreditation system, there are few coherent records. Umalusi lists 449 accredited private FET colleges,[76] but there are many many more institutions operating in the country. Many of them are accredited by Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), but there are also believed to be many which are unaccredited. Institutions generally issue their own qualifications, except where they are linked to international franchises, or in some cases where qualifications are issued by (currently changing) sectoral quality assurance bodies.

[75] http://www.education.gov.za [10 June 2009].

[76] http://www.umalusi.org.za [10 June 2009].

Registration and accreditation of educational institutions are important issues in South Africa, as there are many dubious providers, and "fly-by-nights" which exist only to enroll learners and take their fees. However, as will be seen below, systems for registration and accreditation are new, evolving, and as yet imperfect.

South Africa has fairly high levels of illiteracy, as well as many adults with very low levels of education. Adult education is offered through Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A skills levy is supposed to encourage workplaces to conduct training or send their staff for training, but statistics on this are not easily accessible in terms of actual training conducted.

Apartheid

The apartheid system in South Africa, described as "the most notorious form of racial domination that the postwar world has known" (Thompson 1990, p. 189), was officially established in 1948. The segregationist policies of the previous settler governments were consolidated with greater "singlemindedness, consistency, and ruthlessness", as unwritten customs were enforced by legislation (Muller 1969, p. 481). Laws were passed governing almost every aspect of social life, ensuring that different 'racial' groups remained separate, and confining black people to small parts of the country, designated as 'black homelands'. Officially, these 'homelands' were the national homes of all black people, including those 'resident' in 'white South Africa' (ibid.; Denoon and Nyeko 1984).

Education policy was central to apartheid. Education was used to reinforce lack of democracy, as well as social and economic inequality, by destroying and denying access to education; by providing poor quality education to most black people; and by controlling the content of syllabuses to reflect the interests of the apartheid state.

In 1953, the Government passed an Act to institutionalize inferior education for black people, which came to be referred to as 'Bantu education'. Hendrik Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs, but later Prime Minister, notoriously said, in introducing the Act, that "there is no place for [the Bantu] in the European Community above the levels of certain forms of labour" (extract from Verwoed's speech in the Senate, 7 June 1954, quoted in (Rose and Tunmer 1975, p. 266)). This Act closed schools providing education to black children previously run by churches or NGOs, or took them over as State schools, so that they could only teach the syllabus which the Government deemed fit for black people, explicitly designed for them to be, in Verwoerd's words, 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. Further education Acts introduced a highly-centralized and authoritarian system of control of the syllabus, the employment of teachers, and the admission of learners (Lodge 1983).

The essence of apartheid education was to provide separate education for different race groups, to indoctrinate all children with 'Christian nationalism', and to provide inferior education to black children, to prepare them for a role as inferior citizens and workers (Kallaway 1988). Separate schools and universities were created, not only for the different 'racial groups', but also for different 'ethnic' groups within the black community (Muller 1969). There were thus 18 separate education departments, leading to a system which was fragmented and inefficient, as well as being characterized by extreme inequality and inefficiency. There was a discriminatory hierarchy of financing, resources, facilities, and quality (Hartshorne 1985). The Government spent ten times more per capita on white children's education than on black children's (Thompson 1990). Education was compulsory for white children, but not for black children, few of whom made it past primary school. Black teachers were poorly trained, poorly paid, and taught in very inadequate schools. The State attempted to further reduce expenditure on black education by shortening the school

day for black students to enable teachers to teach double shifts, and under-qualified female 'assistants' were employed in the place of properly-qualified teachers (Lodge 1983). These measures increased enrollments of black children in primary schooling - more people would get less education, and this education was designed as an important part of social control (Hyslop 1993).

'Bantu education' was widely regarded as an attempt to subjugate black people (Buckland 1981; Kallaway 1988). Syllabuses "stressed obedience, communal loyalty, ethnic and national diversity, the acceptance of allocated social roles, piety, and identification with rural culture" (Lodge 1983, p. 116). The white minority who had access to a better education also experienced authoritarianism, particularly in the history syllabus, which has been described as "designed to perpetuate an Afrikaner Nationalist interpretation of South African history" (Lowry 1995, p. 106). Other subjects were also designed to service apartheid ideology: for example, the geography syllabus and textbooks gave official recognition to the apartheid landscape and described African agriculture as "primitive, irrational, subsistence-oriented and based on low-level technology" (Drummond and Paterson 1991, p. 66). Vocational programmes were weak and of very low status, seen as a last choice even for weaker learners, although a fairly robust apprenticeship programme, available only to white men, trained artisans in key state enterprises (Allais 2006).

The economy which the African National Congress (ANC) Government inherited was equally problematic. South Africa had been relatively isolated from the global economy, partly due to economic sanctions, and the self-reliance philosophy of the Afrikaner nationalists. The State was widely viewed corrupt, authoritarian, and untransparent, as well as inefficient, and probably bankrupt (Marais 2001; Bond 2000).

Finally, for the purpose of this study it is worth noting that although the South African apartheid State was brutal in its repression of opposition, and organizations and people were banned, and people were arrested and killed, nonetheless strong and robust civil society organizations developed in South Africa. The main one was the ANC, which was banned, and operating from exile, with many of its leaders in prison. Also important were allies, the South African Communist Party, also banned, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). There was a strong and vibrant community of NGOs, many of which were involved in education in various ways, and there were many youth, student, and other progressive organizations, organized broadly into what was called the United Democratic Front.

The transition to democracy

In 1994, South Africa underwent what has been described as a miracle transition. Through constitutional negotiations, South Africa managed to move from the iniquitous apartheid system to a constitutional democracy with one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. Free and democratic elections took place where many had expected civil war.

South Africa achieved democracy and reentered the global economy in a period of a strong neo-liberal consensus against the welfare state (Desaubin 2002). Re-entrance into the world economy meant a rapid and dramatic liberalization of the South Africa economy, led by the new democratically elected Government, to the surprise and dismay of its trade union and communist allies (idem; Bond 2000; Marais 2001). Various reforms were implemented to facilitate marketization. As is the case in many transitional countries, therefore, the South African transition was characterized by a dual transition from an authoritarian and racist system to democracy on the one hand, and from a complex but partially-centralized and isolated economy to a liberalized economy on the other.

During the early 1990s, when 'talks about talks', and later formal negotiations were taking place, activists involved in education attempted to develop alternative education policies, anticipating that the new democratic government would inherit an education system which was "complex and collapsed", with "high levels of adult and matriculation illiteracy, dysfunctional schools and universities, discredited curricula and illegitimate structures of governance" (Chisholm 2003, p. 269). The ANC-led liberation movement, as it started to prepare itself to become a government, needed a way of overhauling the fragmented and unequal apartheid education system, and a way of ensuring that education played a role in overhauling the economy and reducing social inequalities, but was increasingly aware of a lack of state resources to put into such a project. What was needed was an education policy which could overhaul the apartheid education system without increasing the size of the state, in a participatory, unifying, and democratic manner; which dramatically increased the supply and quality of education in general, but of vocational and technical education and training in particular; and which could ensure that vocational education played a role in improving the country's economy; and which did not cost too much. The miracle transition needed a miracle education policy. The NQF seemed to be that policy.

3. The NQF: Origins, influences, and purpose

The NQF became an important part of the transition to democracy. It was established as an emblem and an instrument of the single national high-quality education and training system that democratic South Africa aspired to create (RSA Departments of Education and Labour, 2002, p. 5). The idea of an NQF became a point of convergence for different groups, resonating with organizations across the political spectrum, and obtaining support from educationalists in many different communities, starting with organized business and labour, but including formal schooling, training, and, to some extent, higher education. It seemed to articulate the concerns of a diverse range of contemporary thinking on education and training policy.

The idea of an NQF emerged in negotiations between trade unions and business about industrial training in the early 1990s, shortly prior to the transition to democracy. Its origins lie in the unions' concerns about the poor education provided to black people; the difficulties faced by black people in accessing education; the racist job reservation system which denied qualifications and jobs to competent black people; and concerns from both industry and the apartheid state about low levels of skills in the workforce and labour market (Allais 2003; Ensor 2003; Cooper 1998; Badroodien and McGrath 2005; Mukora 2006).

Industry, labour, and the apartheid State all agreed that the low levels of education and skills of the workforce in South Africa were hampering the development of the economy as well as preventing individuals from rising to higher levels in the workforce. As in many countries, some of the ideas which have come to be popularly associated with post-Fordism[77] seemed to offer alternatives both to command economies and neo-liberalism,

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[77] I use the term 'post-Fordism' guardedly, although it is frequently invoked in education policy discourse, because the term represents a complex and divergent body of knowledge and analysis: in some instances, theories about production and industrial organization; in others, macroeconomy, culture, and politics. It is sometimes used descriptively, while others use it prescriptively to advocate changes they think should be made. It is often linked with arguments for flatter workplaces, which are seen by advocates of this approach as inherently more democratic, and in which workers are seen to have greater autonomy and scope for initiative. Still others seek it as part of a change in the

based on achieving a certain type of education and training system (Desaubin 2002; Lugg 2007; Kraak 1994). The belief was that the low level of skills in South Africa was the main barrier to achieving a strategic edge in the global economy, and a highly-skilled labour force able of achieving flexible specialization was seen as the solution (Von Holdt 1991; Samson 1999, Mukora 2006).

Within the labour movement, the origins of this policy position came from the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA). Desaubin (2002), Spreen (2001) and Lugg (2007) trace the origins of NUMSA's engagement with education and training policies to specific challenges in the metals industry in the late 1980s, characterized by massive industrial restructuring and the introduction of new technologies. NUMSA, engaging with counterparts in Australia, developed an analysis of how low levels of skills in South Africa and the crisis-ridden education system were barriers to the development of what was described as post-Fordist production systems (Desaubin 2002; Lugg 2007). Post-Fordism was understood to be a co-determinist system approach to increasing productivity and prosperity, whereby a more skilled labour force contributed to 'intelligent design', and benefited from the ensuing higher wages and success of industry (ISP 1994).

The analysis coming from Numsa was very much based on conditions in metal industries. There was much debate within the broader labour movement, as very different organizational and industrial approaches were dominant in different sectors. There was dispute about the likelihood about South Africa moving to post-Fordist production, as well as the supposed benefits of such a move, as well as whether South Africa had indeed ever really had Fordist industry, and the applicability of post-Fordist ideas to other sectors (Mukora 2006). But, the broad ideas pushed by Numsa gradually became adopted as official policy of the labour movement.

There was general agreement that poor pay and lack of career opportunities for black workers were a problem in all sectors of the economy, and policies aimed at breaking down barriers to education and training, as well as linking the world of education and the world of work, had broad appeal. The fact that black workers often were denied promotion because they lacked formal qualifications, despite their experience and skills, created wide support for the idea of giving people certificates based on their existing skills and knowledge.

Ideas about competency-based education and outcomes-based education entered South Africa in this context. Like many progressive movements globally, Numsa picked up ideas about competence, thinking that they would support their goals by ensuring relevance and promoting flexible specialization, which was seen as the route to a highly-skilled, mobile workforce, and therefore international competitiveness (Allais 2007b, Lugg 2007). The belief was that a clear relationship between skills, grading, and wages would allow workers to move up a career-path through the provision of training modules accredited by tripartite bodies (ISP 1994, p. 67). In a complex process, with much disagreement and debate along the way, this idea became official policy in the liberation movement. The debates converged on the recommendation for "...a national vocational qualifications system fully integrated with formal academic qualifications" (NECC [3] 1992a, p. 41).

At the same time, the apartheid state had started thinking along similar lines (Mukora 2006). Various commissions emphasized the failure of the education and training systems in meeting the needs of the economy, as well as the impact of technological changes, which

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regulation of social conflict, with declining scope and effectiveness of collective bargaining, resulting in a shift from to private and individualized forms of welfare consumption.

would further increase skills shortages. These commissions also recommended a competency-based modular approach to training, with industry-based systems of accreditation controlled by employers, and a reduced role for the State (McGrath 1996).

The National Training Board (NTB) set up by the apartheid State, which included organized business, organized labour, and specific Government departments, was where the various groups came together, and consensus was developed around the idea of an NQF prior the election of the first ANC Government in 1994. French (2009, p. 23), in a commentary published by SAQA, argues that "considerable faith was placed in international and local advocacy and in the persuasiveness of arguments without evidence". Representatives of both business and labour borrowed ideas about competency-based education from Australia and qualifications frameworks from New Zealand. The unions were primarily influenced by the Australian approach to competency-based education (Cooper 1998; Samson 1999; NECC 1992b; Spreen 2001; Lugg 2007). A very influential representative from business, from the mining firm Gencor, had been influenced by the New Zealand qualifications framework, and drew on it explicitly in the discussion (Badroodien and McGrath 2005). The representative from the Private Sector Education Council explains that the National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the United Kingdom, Robert Mager's ideas about criterion referenced instruction, and the 1992 Mayer Report on Key Competencies in Australia influenced his thinking (Vorwerk 2004). They all agreed that formal education and training institutions in South Africa were responsible for low levels of skills and poor productivity. In this context, a system which focused on outputs was argued to meet both the economic and social needs of the country and the development needs of the individual. They jointly reached the conclusion that a national framework of learning outcomes, compiled into qualifications and part qualifications, would address their various concerns (Lugg 2007; Spreen 2001).

The idea of an NQF was proposed as a mechanism which could create sense and coherence out of the fragmented education and training system, but also which could drive the creation of the desired type of education and training system. Thus, the NQF was seen as the core - or the keystone, according to French (2009), and as a central mechanism through which education and training would be transformed.

A clear and distinctive conceptual model for an NQF was developed in this process, centred on the idea of using a qualifications framework, consisting of levels on which qualifications and part qualifications composed of learning outcomes would be placed, to drive educational reform (Allais 2007b). A small group of individuals, including the representatives of labour and business who had initiated the idea of the NQF, developed detailed proposals of what it would look like (Badroodien and McGrath 2005; Lugg 2007). The model that they developed became the blueprint for the NQF that was created. The key feature of the model was the role of learning outcomes in qualifications. Learning outcomes defined by stakeholders outside of educational institutions and programmes were seen as the central mechanism, which, it was claimed, would enable the realization of the many desired policy goals.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act was passed in 1995 (Republic of South Africa Act No. 58 of 1995). It was the first education and training legislation of the new Parliament elected in the first democratic elections in South Africa. This Act brought the NQF legally into being, with SAQA as the body responsible for developing and implementing it. Implementation began in earnest in late 1997 after senior staff appointments had been made (SAQA 1997, 1998).

As mentioned above, the South African NQF has been widely acknowledged as one of the most ambitious qualifications frameworks in the world, and is marked out from others by its "scale and ambition" and its "perceived centrality to the reconstruction of society in the political and social context of a post-apartheid regime" (Granville 2004). This has been one of its most praised as well as most criticized aspects. Envisaged as a policy to underpin

all other education and training policies, the NQF was designed to use qualifications to transform South Africa's deeply fragmented and unequal education and training system, increase access, make education more democratic, but at the same time, ensure that education played a role in improving the South African economy. Its stated objectives were to:

- create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;

- facilitate access to education and training;

- facilitate mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;

- enhance quality of education and training;

- accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities;

- contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.[78]

But in a sense its purpose, or the hopes which were pinned on it, were broader than this list. It was regarded as a transformative instrument, which would "expand the ways in which people are able to acquire learning and qualifications of high quality" (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002). It was to be a mechanism for the integration of education and training, as well as for changing perceptions about the relative value of different qualifications and different types of learning. It was hoped that it would encourage curriculum innovation in response to community and industry demands (Gewer 2001, p. 135). It was also hoped that through the NQF, learning opportunities would be opened for the disadvantaged, and learners would be able to progress through articulated qualification levels and coherent career paths (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002). The idea was that qualifications would transcend institutions - because all providers would be offering programmes leading to the same outcomes, the NQF would "remove the obsession with institutional learning as the measure of a person's worth, because national qualifications will be blind as to where the learning takes place" (HSRC 1995, p. 15).

A major part of the rationale for the NQF was that it was seen as a tool for dramatic change, for, as Young (2005) puts it, a 'break with the past' was needed. As SAQA explains,

> … the NQF is primarily about systemic change: how a system is put in place that allows for adaptability, flexibility, responsiveness and accountability in setting standards; relevance, quality, creativity and accountability in the design and implementation of learning programmes; ensuring that the qualifications and standards and their delivery are of the degree of excellence that is specified. (SAQA 2000b, p. 7)

However, a commentary on the NQF published by SAQA points out that "...no structure, idea, or intention of the NQF has ever been allowed to be put to the test of scenario planning, in that there is a toughly-imagined examination of the use of its functionalities by actual people in actual situations" (French 2009, p. 62). As we shall see, things did not go according to plan.

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[78] South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995.

4. The design and implementation

The design of the South African NQF, including its types of qualifications, the systems for the development and award of qualifications, notions of learning outcomes, and structures and governance arrangements, have changed over time. The account below starts with an explanation of how the NQF was designed. This is referred to as NQF Version 1.0, or the blueprint. In some senses, this blueprint is still seen as describing the NQF - it is the version which is upfronted on SAQA's website, and is taught in a series of modules developed by SAQA about the NQF. However, as implementation of the NQF began, some changes to the blueprint were made, and these are referred to below as NQF Version 1.1. The changes are important to understand, as they are often not apparent in official documents, or their significance is underplayed.

As will be discussed below, the NQF underwent a lengthy period of policy review. During this period, some additional changes were made to the NQF, and these are described below as NQF Version 1.2. Very recently, the differences between the Departments Education and Labour were finally resolved, at least enough for a substantially-changed NQF to emerge, described below as Version 2.0. However, just when it appeared to be over, a newly-inaugurated President reorganized Cabinet, with implications which have yet to be fully understood. This will probably result in further modifications to Version 2.0, creating Version 2.1; it may, however, mean that the NQF will again be substantially changed, resulting in Version 3.0.

The NQF version 1.0 (the blueprint)

The original design of the South African NQF was very directly related to the purposes for which it was created. Outcomes-based qualifications were seen as a solution to many of the educational, social, and economic problems of apartheid. A national qualifications framework that overarched all education and training seemed to be a mechanism that would ensure that learning was 'relevant' and of high quality, produce learners who were competent in the workplace and provide access to those previously excluded, recognize the learning that they had achieved informally, ensure that all qualifications were of equal status, and ensure that assessment was transparent and fair (Allais 2007b).

The key design feature which linked to these purposes was the idea of learning outcomes, developed separately from educational institutions and educational programmes, against which learning would be delivered, assessed, quality assured, and certified. It was thought that using learning outcomes in this way would democratize education because stakeholders would all have a say in the standards (SAQA 2000a). It was believed that knowledge could therefore be democratized and made transparent, and would no longer be the preserve of experts (idem). Thus, the NQF was designed to remove the power of defining knowledge and skills from formal institutions, and to do away with educational institutions as the source of authority on qualifications. They would no longer define the benchmarks of what was worth knowing, nor be the only arbiters of what learners had achieved. In other words, everyone would have a say in the outcomes of educational process, instead of only the experts in a particular field. Educational institutions would, it was argued, be free to choose their own 'content' or 'knowledge', as long as it enabled learners to 'acquire' the outcomes specified (SAQA 2000b). This seemed like an alternative to the highly-authoritarian and prescriptive curriculum approach of the apartheid Government.

But also (and perhaps this is to some extent contradictory with the desire for democratization), this process was seen as a way of ensuring that industry could play a much larger role in defining standards, and also, that employers would come to see investing in training as an important priority.

It was further believed that the creation of independent outcome statements would increase provision of education, because any 'provider' would be able to offer learning programmes against the outcome statements; thus, new providers could emerge (SAQA 2000a, e). Increased provision would lead, it was believed, to increased access.

Outcomes also seemed to be a mechanism for improving quality - because they would specify standards for all educational provision, and all educational institutions would have to meet the standards, thus ensuring that all learners were given education of an equal quality. The outcomes-based qualifications would improve the quality of education as they would indicate to institutions the standard expected of them, and regulatory bodies would be able to check up on what institutions were offering against the prescribed outcomes (SAQA 2000e). Increased supply of education would lead to competition, also improving quality. Further, because the competences that someone had achieved would be transparently specified and available for general scrutiny, it would be straightforward to decide which competences were applicable in other courses or programmes that a learner wanted to undertake, and there would be minimal duplication, and maximum economic efficiency within the education system (SAQA 2000a).

At the same time, the outcomes-led qualifications framework model was seen as a way of totally overhauling the apartheid education system, because all existing qualifications were to be replaced by the outcomes-based qualifications designed separately from educational institutions. This meant that no existing educational provision would remain untouched - all educational institutions would be obliged to redesign their programmes on the basis of these specified outcomes, or to develop new programmes to meet the requirements of specified outcomes.

Outcomes were also seen as a way of equating learning through formal and non-formal education, as well as knowledge and skills gained through the course of work and the struggle against apartheid. Because outcomes would be developed separately from specific institutions or specific learning programmes, it was thought that they could be the benchmarks against which all learning was measured. As has been discussed above, this was of particular concern to trade unions, who were concerned that black workers' lack of formal qualifications was used to justify the lower pay that they were given in many workplaces, even when they had the equivalent skills (Bird 1992).

Further, it was believed that organizing all qualifications and parts of qualifications on a hierarchy of levels would force society to value types of learning programmes which had historically been of low status, which would increase efficiency and encourage more learners to enroll in vocational programmes (Allais 2007b).

Outcomes-based qualifications were therefore seen as a solution to the educational problems and economic problems of apartheid, and the idea of specifying learning outcomes separately from educational institutions and programmes was the central feature of the NQF which linked its objectives to its design.

Essential to this idea is the notion that outcomes-based qualifications and unit standards can provide clear and explicit statements of competence: "A national qualification will define a genuine competence at a particular level on the National Qualifications Framework" (HSRC 1995, p. 15). SAQA explained that "Outcomes are the qualities … that are expected at the end of a process of learning. The meaning of outcomes is similar to the concept of competence" (SAQA 2004d, p. 6).

The South African NQF was designed as a highly-comprehensive qualifications framework, covering the entire education system at all levels and in all sectors. The grid of eight levels and 12 fields was supposed to encompass all learning that took place in South Africa - at all levels, in all areas. The 12 fields are show in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

South Africa did not officially adopt functional analysis in the development of unit standards. This could be because conventional competence-based models were seen as narrow, and the people involved in the original design of the NQF were very concerned to create a broader notion of outcomes (French 2009). Also, as the South African NQF was comprehensive, aimed at covering all education at all levels, it would have been impossible, as many of the unit standards and qualifications developed did not have a direct relationship with specific industries. Nonetheless, detailed requirements and specifications for qualifications and unit standards were created, as well as manuals and guidelines for their development, and these documents used a very similar approach to functional analysis (SAQA 2000a,b,c,d,e).

Allied/supporting strategies

Two important policies were introduced which were closely related to the NQF and had similar aims. The first was an outcomes-based reform of the school curriculum, introduced initially into the primary school, with the intention of later extension to secondary schooling. This was referred to as Curriculum 2005. The second was a National Skills Development Strategy. The latter introduced a payroll levy for workplace training, and set up institutions and structures to oversee this and its related processes. Importantly, it set up sectoral Education and Training Authorities in different sectors of the economy, which were supposed to be important quality assurance bodies for some of the NQF qualifications.

Setting up the structures

As stated above, SAQA, the South African Qualifications Authority, was created through an Act of Parliament in 1995. It was an independent statutory body under the joint oversight of the Ministries of Education and Labour. SAQA saw itself as the body which would oversee the creation of standards - learning outcomes specified in qualifications or part qualifications called unit standards. It created 12 National Standards Bodies (NSBs) - stakeholder-based bodies, which were given responsibility for overseeing qualifications and unit standards in each of the 12 fields of the NQF. Under each NSB, a large number of Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) were created. The SGBs were comprised of representatives of experts and interest groups (SAQA 2000c, d). SGBs were supposed to develop the outcomes-based qualifications and unit standards for all education and training in South Africa. These would then populate the eight levels and 12 fields of the NQF. Gradually, all previous qualifications would disappear. Only the new qualifications and unit standards would remain, with no institutional relationships, located on a level and in a field, designed by an SGB, and ratified, first by the stakeholder representatives in an NSB, and then by stakeholder representatives in the SAQA Board (the Authority). None of these qualifications would have a direct relationship to an educational provider - they would all be national qualifications.

Educational providers would be accredited by quality assurance bodies to offer programmes leading to specific qualifications. The quality assurance bodies would check up on how well they were doing this, and on whether or not they were assessing learners appropriately against the learning outcomes (SAQA 2000e).

A point which was not made explicit in the early documentation is which institutions would issue certificates - would it be educational institutions or quality assurance bodies?

Assessment was central to the design of the NQF - because of the idea that the outcomes are not linked to a specific programme of learning, and that anyone can be assessed against them. It was believed that because the learning outcomes would clearly contain the standard to be assessed against, qualifications would have credibility, as is explained in the following quote from an early SAQA publication:

Reliability is ensured in that specified standards, outcomes and competences and their accompanying criteria are the basis upon which assessment is planned and administered. These are a constant, regardless of who is assessing and who is being assessed. Laying down these specifications makes it incumbent upon the assessor to use them as a guide in planning, developing and administering assessment. Because they are specific, known and clearly understood by all who are affected, they act as an in-built mechanism against assessor inconsistency, deviation or error. (Mokhobo-Nomvete 1999)

But, even though it was believed that standards would be specific enough to enable fair assessment, it was still felt that there would be a need for extra measures to ensure that all assessors assessed appropriately. The plan was that each individual assessor, whether based in an educational institution or not, must be registered as an assessor.

As will be apparent in the discussion below, the seemingly simple model became much more complicated as it started to be put into practice.

Getting going: The NQF 1.1.

The structures were put in place, as shown in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter, which indicates the way relationships between the key roleplayers and stakeholders were supposed to work. Perhaps the most significant departure at this point from the original idea was that the SAQA Authority was constituted under the Ministers of Education and Labour, while the original idea had been a joint Ministry.

By 1997, SAQA had created its 12 National Standards Bodies, and many hundreds of SGBs were created underneath them (French 2009). In the following years, quality assurance bodies were put in place. However, some of these, constituted in 25 different sectors of the economy, were created under the Minister of Labour through the Skills Development Act. And two quality assurance bodies were created under the Minister of Education; one for General and Further Education and Training (that is, all education below tertiary education) and one for Higher Education through their own Acts of Parliament. In a significant deviation from SAQA's intentions, the quality assurance bodies under the Minister of Education were given legislative power through their own Acts of Parliament, which meant that they were not empowered to do their work by being accredited by SAQA. The sectoral quality assurance bodies, however, under the Minister of Labour, had to be accredited by SAQA in order to carry out quality assurance.

The eight levels of the NQF were to be described by level descriptors. However, although in 2009 many NQFs exist with level descriptors in place (albeit mainly based on Australian, Scottish, and increasingly, European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level descriptors), in the mid-90s in South Africa, these were not common place. There was much debate about whether descriptors should or could be developed up front, or if instead, they should be developed based on an analysis of the qualifications developed, and the knowledge and skills represented by them. When the South African NQF was first created, although the existing qualifications were not supposed to be driving it, as they were to be replaced by it, they were used to give an indication of what the levels 'meant' in terms of the qualifications with which people were familiar. So, level 1 was designated as the end of grade 7, or the equivalent end of adult basic education. Level 4 was designated as the end of senior secondary schooling, or the senior certificate. And level 5 was seen as the first level of higher education. Preliminary level descriptors were developed, but not adopted as policy, and much debate ensued over the following years, particularly about which levels in relation to the various higher education qualifications.

The work began: Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) started to generate standards, National Standards Bodies (NSBs) to ratify them, and the SAQA Authority to register them on the NQF. The first unit standards were registered on the NQF in June 1998, and more followed in 1999 (SAQA 1999). By 2001, SAQA reported that 65 SGBs were registered,

and another 100 were described as 'operational'. It also reported that 39 new qualifications and 655 unit standards were registered on the NQF, and 12 Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) were accredited (SAQA 2001). By March 2002, an additional 48 new SGBs were registered. Ninety-eight new qualifications and 2,413 new standards had been registered on the NQF. Thirty-one ETQAs had been accredited, including all the ETQAs that existed under the 25 SETAs. Some examples of the new qualifications and unit standard titles are provided in Appendix 3 at the end of this chapter.

Registration of assessors

As discussed above, the notion of 'registered assessors' was central to the original design of the NQF, as awards of qualifications and therefore assessment was not supposed to be linked to any particular programme of study or institution. SAQA initially pronounced that anyone in South Africa who wished to assess a learner in order for a learner to be granted a certificate had to be registered as an assessor. An assessment unit standard was developed and, according to SAQA's policy, in order to assess any education or training in South Africa, an individual would have to be assessed against this unit standard and found competent. SAQA gave a four-year grace period for this to happen, ending in May 2004 (SAQA 2001).

However, a logical problem presented itself, because in order to be assessed as competent against the assessment unit standard, one had to be assessed by a registered assessor - because only a registered assessor was seen as proven to be competent in the business of assessing, and therefore able to make a reliable judgement. But initially, there were no registered assessors who could have been assessed as competent, because the standard had only just been created. The Education, Training, and Development Practices Quality Assurance body, the quality assurance agency under SAQA that had been designated as responsible for this unit standard, therefore selected a group of 'providers', who were decided to be sufficiently competent to be able to offer training against the standard, and conduct assessment against it.

The decision that assessors must be registered on the basis of having been assessed as competent against the assessment unit standard generated, in certain quarters, created a rush to get registered, and correspondingly, a flurry of income-generation for institutions offering 'assessor training' against the standard. In particular, people working in private providers, people wanting to generate an income through conducting assessment, and people working in Further Education and Training Colleges, attended assessor training courses, in order to try to qualify. However, despite SAQA's official proclamation, people working in schools and universities did rush down this route.

'Legacy' or 'provider' qualifications

As discussed above, the intention was for the NQF to replace all existing qualifications, and for all qualifications in South Africa to be national, not linked to specific providers, generated through Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs). The NQF would be a repository of these national qualifications, which specified learning outcomes. However, obviously, SAQA did not want to (and, as it turned out later, although it was not obvious at the time, it did not have either the legal or moral authority to) do away with all qualifications currently on offer, when new ones did not yet exist. SAQA therefore decided to register, on an 'interim' basis, all existing qualifications (SAQA 1997).

These qualifications were referred to by SAQA as 'legacy' qualifications, and were seen as qualifications that would be phased out, as soon as the new system of designing and registering unit standards and outcomes-based qualifications was up and running. A transitional period of five years (from 1 Jan. 1998 to 31 Dec. 2002) was decided on, after which the idea was that all these 'legacy' qualifications would fall away (idem).

Thus, as the NQF started to be populated with qualifications, there were two distinct types of qualifications. The one was those developed by institutions, and the other, those developed through the structures of SAQA. This distinction is not immediately apparent - looking at the framework, one would simply see a list of qualifications.

Criticisms emerge

Despite the initial wide support for the broad idea of an NQF, difficulties emerged very quickly. Criticism of the NQF and of outcomes-based education started to develop as early as 1997, where proceedings of a conference on the NQF organized by left-wing education organizations show intense disagreement and predictions of doom for the model (Breier 1998), and the view that the NQF was attempting to contain serious contradictions (Muller 1998; Cooper 1998). Critics described it as "complex and esoteric" (Breier 1998, p. 74), and "large, unwieldy, expensive, complex and somewhat unstable", as well as "out of line with the *modus operandi* of the formal education sector (Ensor 2003, p. 334).

Many people and organizations felt alienated by the terminology and structures of SAQA and the NQF, which were unfamiliar to the traditional concerns of educational institutions (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002). Lugg (2007) documents the increasing unease of trade unionists, who were unable to participate meaningfully in the plethora of structures that had been created. A SAQA employee, Nadina Coetzee, describes the implementation of the NQF as characterized by "intense debate, tension and even resistance" (SAQA 2004a, p. 79). Jansen (2004, p. 89) argues that

> …the manageable set of good ideas soon found itself engulfed and overpowered by a powerful bureaucratic and administrative apparatus so that the simple founding principles were completely lost to ordinary people.

At the same time, the introduction of the outcomes-based curriculum, known as Curriculum 2005, at grade one level met with enormous difficulties (Chisholm 2003; Taylor 2000; 2002; Taylor and Vinjevold 1999), and there was increasing concern that instead of addressing inequalities between black and former white schools, it was increasing them (Vally and Spreen 2003).

Power relations and contradictory legislation

As mentioned above, when the NQF was first conceived of, it was assumed/hoped that there would be a single Minister of Education and Training, but after the democratic elections, separate Ministries were created for Education and Labour respectively. This separation, and apparently irreconcilable differences between the two Ministries and their respective departments, are widely seen as having contributed to the problems experienced by the NQF (Lugg 2007; French 2009).

By 1998, there was an array of new legislation to transform education and training. These Acts did not always reinforce each other, and sometimes contradicted each other (Allais 2006; French 2009). A large number of new bodies were created, without clear relationships to each other, and, more importantly, without clear specification of their respective lines of responsibility, authority, and accountability. So, for example, legislation gave SAQA the power to register qualifications and standards on the NQF, as well as the power to accredit ETQAs, meaning that, in theory, it should overarch the whole education and training system. But the National Education Policy Act (Act No. 27 of 1997) gave the Minister of Education power to determine a wide range of education policies, such as those concerning curriculum frameworks, core syllabuses and education programmes, learning standards, examinations, and the certification of qualifications. This Act was passed by Parliament after the SAQA Act. As will be seen below, the Department interpreted its mandate as defining all aspects of qualifications for school, adult education, and further education colleges (the entire State formal education system below tertiary education),

outside of the structures and systems of SAQA. While the National Standards Bodies were supposed to register standards across all areas of education and training, in practice the Department of Education developed the curriculum in schools, and public colleges continued to offer predominantly Department of Education programmes - in other words, the whole formal education system below tertiary education. Higher education in general also continued to develop its own curricula against qualifications regulated by the Department of Education. Higher education institutions continued to issue their own qualifications.

As could be predicted looking at the diagram in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter, the configuration of quality assurance bodies caused a very serious problem, as any given vocational, technical, or professional qualification or unit standard would fall under two quality assurance bodies - one under the Minister of Labour, and one under the Minister of Education. A further problem inherent in this structural arrangement was that unless an educational provider offered only one type of learning programme, it could potentially be obliged to deal with up to 26 different quality assurance bodies. The plan was for this to be dealt with through memoranda of understanding between different quality assurance bodies, but this proved unworkable for the bodies themselves, particularly because the quality assurance bodies operated in fundamentally different paradigms. Umalusi, the quality assurance body for General and Further Education and Training, operated primarily through an examination system, and refused to engage with unit standards-based qualifications. As explained in research which I conducted for Umalusi, it declared itself unable to reach memoranda of understanding with bodies whose quality assurance mechanisms it did not trust (Allais et al. 2007).

Parker (2001) argues that the lack of clarity about roles and relationships, as well as the large number of structures involved in the NQF, have absorbed large amounts of energy.

Policy reviews

A review of the NQF was announced in 2000 by the then Minister of Education, who also instituted a review of the outcomes-based curriculum which had been implemented in the primary and junior secondary school system. This was, as many commentators have observed, an extremely short period of time for an education policy to have a chance to be implemented. However, as very briefly described above, clearly, problems were emerging. The Report produced by the international Study Group who conducted the review, based on extensive stakeholder discussions, refers to "widespread anxiety and dissatisfaction among public bodies and stakeholders and in the Departments of Education and Labour" (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002, p. 1) as well as a "broad malaise of discontent with SAQA and the NQF" (ibid., p. 143).

The review of the outcomes-based school curriculum got underway quickly and reported by 2000 (RSA Department of Education 2000). The Department accepted that major changes needed to be made to the curriculum, and immediately created the structures and processes to do so.

But the NQF was under the Minister of Labour as well as the Minister of Education, and disagreement emerged about whether there should be a review, and what its nature should be (Lugg 2007). After much contestation about the idea of such an early review, it was defined as a review of 'implementation' - in other words, the terms of reference emphasized an investigation into how the NQF was being implemented, and not into the design of the NQF. The release of the report of the review in 2002 was followed by a lengthy period of confusion and inaction on behalf of Government, widely believed to stem from inability of the two departments to agree with each other (Lugg 2007; French 2009). The review team had suggested that both in terms of their analysis of the problems and their ideas about what should be done about them, the Departments of Education and Labour

were "mirror-images" of each other (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002, p. 33).

Thus, although fairly substantial changes had been recommended, there was no official indication from the Ministers about what changes would be made. In 2003, following public comment, and then a lengthy period of official silence and what has been characterized as "conflicted and secretive discussions" (Lugg 2007, p. 225), the two departments released a *Consultative document*, aimed to signal how the NQF should be changed. This was followed by further public consultation, which again proved inconclusive. The two departments had hoped that this document would in some way reach out to all the different stakeholders, and address their different concerns. In fact, it did the reverse, meeting with almost universal disapproval, albeit for very different reasons (Allais 2007b). The long silence of the two departments *prior* to releasing the *Consultative document* proved to be shorter than the lengthy period of silence *after* the release of this document.

The NQF 1.2. Some changes, as well as continuing with the model during the review period

During the period of ongoing review (2000 to 2008), with no resolution and no policy pronouncements coming from its sponsoring departments, SAQA continued to develop the NQF largely according to its original design. This created the difficult situation whereby over a lengthy period, there was official documentation in circulation suggesting substantial changes; there was recognition that some changes would inevitably happen; and yet business continued as usual. It is difficult to know what else could have been done by the officials in SAQA as well as all the other structures with relationships to the NQF (Umalusi, the Council for Higher Education, the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)) who operated in an uncertain policy environment for many years, and responded mainly to the immediate imperatives of their scope of operation. Thus, Standard Generating Bodies continued to generate standards, quality assurance bodies to accredit providers, and SAQA to register qualifications and unit standards, and so on. As Merlyn Mehl put it, writing in the *SAQA Bulletin,*

> …[u]nit standards, qualifications, qualification-sets and qualifications frameworks are more and more rapidly coming off the production line. (Mehl 2004, p. 42)

By March 2005, 696 unit standards-based qualifications and 8,208 unit standards had been registered on the NQF. SAQA maintained the idea of 'setting standards' as a process of determining the learning outcomes to be included in a qualification, separately from an institution or learning programme.

However, although hundreds of qualifications and thousands of unit standards were being developed, by July 2003, only 1,036 providers had been registered by the SETA quality assurance bodies, of the approximately 19,078 providers that, according to SAQA, needed to be accredited, and tiny numbers of learners had been awarded qualifications through the SETAs (SAQA 2004a). Many of the qualifications which had been developed were not located in any quality assurance body - by August 2005, 299 qualifications were referred to by SAQA (officially) as 'orphans'.[79]

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[79] Presentation by Yvonne Shapiro, Director of the National Learner Records Database at SAQA, at the SAQA ETQA (Education and Training Quality Assurance) Forum, 3 Aug. 2005.

Some new changes to the original design of the NQF were implemented in this period. The most significant ones are the continued acceptance of legacy/provider qualifications; the disbanding of the National Standards Bodies; the acceptance that assessors in educational institutions would in the main not be registered as assessors; and the creation by the Department of Education of a qualifications framework for higher education, including two additional levels to the NQF. Each of these is discussed briefly below.

Continued acceptance of legacy/provider qualifications

In contradiction to its earlier deadlines, the period for the registration of 'interim' qualifications was again increased until June 2006 (SAQA 2004b). In 2005, SAQA started referring to 'provider' qualifications instead of 'interim' qualifications, suggesting a shift in how these qualifications were thought of, and perhaps an acceptance that they might start to be a permanent feature of the NQF (SAQA 2005a).

In addition, a major new provider qualification was developed and registered on the NQF. One of the most important qualifications in South Africa, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), (the certificate signifying the end of senior secondary school, and determining access to university) was officially registered on the NQF despite being based on curricula developed by the Department of Education, and not being based on learning outcomes. As a commentary on the NQF published by SAQA admits, this qualification in many ways operates without reference to the NQF (French 2009).

Rejection of the registration of assessors

The notion that anyone who wanted to conduct assessment in South Africa should be registered as an assessor after being found competent against the assessment unit standard was rejected in the two review documents. The suggestion was that anyone who was employed as an educator in an educational institution should not have to meet this requirement - that is, teachers and lecturers (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002; 2003). While there was no official policy pronouncement on this matter during the period of uncertainty, certainly there were no mass moves to get accredited in universities and schools, and it seems as if there was acceptance that this requirement would fall away.

The Higher Education Framework and new levels

In July 2004, a framework for qualifications in higher education was released by the Ministry of Education (RSA Ministry of Education 2004). This document, entitled the *New academic policy for higher education,* was the end product of a long process of consultation through earlier versions of the document, and enacted a particular way of resolving the ongoing problems with the NQF. It indicated that the number of levels of the NQF would be changed from eight to ten, in line with the proposals of both the two review documents. It contained draft level descriptors for the higher education levels of the NQF. It also indicated that the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) would be the only quality assurance body to operate in higher education, and in addition, that it would assume the function of standards setting. This was a dramatic shift both from the original conception of the NQF, and from many of the proposals of the *Consultative document*, because it made it clear that no other bodies would issue qualifications in higher education. In addition, the framework of qualifications proposed was a framework in the sense of a register of

qualification *types*[80], which is very different to the original NQF model, which was to contain all the registered, new outcomes-based qualifications.

Structural changes

SAQA (2005b) started implementing some changes to its systems and structures during this time, such as disbanding the National Standards Bodies (NSBs). SAQA (2005b) created an 'interim' strategy for standards setting, arguing that these structures could not be recreated in the absence of direction on the future of the NQF.

The number of levels of the NQF was officially increased from eight to ten (SAQA 2006).

The NQF 2.0: Three linked frameworks

Late in 2008, a set of bills were finally drafted to create substantial changes to the NQF (RSA 2008a,b,c,d). The new National Qualifications Framework Act (Republic of South Africa Act No. 67 of 2008) split the NQF into three linked frameworks, and created the basis for three Quality Councils for each framework. The remaining Acts created the two quality councils, and amended the Skills Development Act in order to create the third. The power of SAQA to set standards was removed, and was instead located in these three Councils, each of which seems set about doing this work in ways which are not only substantially different from SAQA's outcomes-based qualifications, but also different from each other (Umalusi 2007; RSA Department of Labour 2008). As noted by a report commissioned by the South African Department of Labour and the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), SAQA now has the substantially-reduced role of coordinating between the three Quality Councils which now oversee three separate qualifications frameworks (Heitmann and Mummenthey 2009). Notably, the NQF is now defined as an entity in its own right, and not only in relation to SAQA. SAQA is now only one of four organizations responsible for the NQF. The diagram in Appendix 4, sourced from the report published by the GTZ[81] and Department of Labour, illustrates the configuration of relationships.

One of SAQA's roles in the new NQF is to maintain a single set of level descriptors for the NQF. This is supposed to ensure some coherence between the three linked frameworks. As briefly mentioned above, level descriptors were the source of some debate in the initial and ongoing design of the NQF, and were not initially created as official policy, as some argued that they could not be developed in a vacuum. Level descriptors for levels 1 to 4 were created as policy after a few years, and for higher education, much later. Much of the debate was about whether the same descriptors could capture sufficiently the essence of different levels in different knowledge areas. Notwithstanding these debates, it would probably be hard to find many people in South Africa, whether in educational institutions or even in the official standards setting structures of SAQA, who in fact have

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[80] Qualification types refers to, for example, 'Advanced Diploma' or 'Bachelor's Degree', which could be modified by a designator, or Advanced Diploma (Drama), or Bachelor's Degree (Linguistics). But the actual awarded qualifications would be linked to the awarding institution, and based on their prescriptions for subject choices, and their curriculum and assessment policies.

[81] It is interesting to note, given that policy borrowing as well as international technical assistance continue to play such a dominant role in qualifications frameworks internationally, that all the initial work for the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) has been conducted with funding and support from the GTZ.

used these documents. While I worked for Umalusi, the Chief Executive Officer, backed by her senior staff, made it clear not only that they did not use them, but that they did not see any meaning in them, or use for them. Standards and levels, as is discussed below, were seen as defined by curricula and the standards of examinations. While these were hotly contested, level descriptors were not seen as useful to resolve the debates. For example, a major debate has taken place about the breadth and depth of the senior secondary school Physical Science curriculum, as well as the standard of the examinations (Umalusi 2007). Level descriptors tend to say things like '...broad factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study', or to talk about the level of autonomy of the learner. None of this helps a body like Umalusi, which has to take decisions about the curriculum and examinations.

The new arrangement brings qualifications much closer to institutions, and moves away from the notion of outcomes-based qualifications as things defined and determined outside of educational institutions. Umalusi, in general and further education and training, works predominantly with qualifications that are broadly specified in terms of numbers and types of subjects, and are accompanied by a curriculum which is developed by an assessment body that also sets and administers an external examination. It sees 'standards' as lying within a combination of the quality of that curriculum, the quality and standards of the examinations used to test learners on it, and the quality of the educational institutions offering it (Umalusi 2007). It is important to note that further education here incorporates the vocational education which happens in the Further Education and Training Colleges (FETCs), which are currently implementing new curricula, developed by the Department of Education.

The HEQC works with a framework of qualification types, which specify the nomenclature and relationships of the different qualifications on offer in higher education. It is also involved in a process of creating broad competency statements for different types of degrees. Significantly, both these bodies are not new bodies, but are built on existing institutions that have reputations as well as established relationships, modes of operation, and systems. Both of them, as seen in the diagram in Appendix 4, are constituted under the Minister of Education. Under the HEQC, higher education institutions will continue to issue their own qualifications, and design their own curricula. They will be subject to emerging and still contested quality assurance procedures, but retain their autonomy.

As stated above, legislation which enabled the creation of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) as a structure under the Minister of Labour was passed, and while the other two Quality Councils are independent statutory bodies, in this legislation the QCTO was seen as a structure within the Department of Labour. This means it has less legislative clout. The fact that it is an entirely new structure means that it does not operate within established modes of operation, established relationships amongst different roleplayers, or histories of traditions.

Initial documents which are publicly available suggest that in some ways it will operate most similarly to the original design of NQF, but with substantive differences. The proposal is that it will base its work on an Organizing Framework for Occupations (OFOs).[82] This framework will be used as a starting point for the development of occupational curricula. Each qualification on the framework will be linked with a specific curriculum and specific assessment specifications. This is a major departure from the thinking of the NQF, which thought that while outcomes should be specified, curricula should be the responsibility of individual educational institutions. It uses the term 'unit

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[82] http://www.labour.gov.za   [10 June 2009].

standards', but these are dramatically reconceptualized. While the original unit standards could have any amount of credit and varied from one credit to 90 credits, it will stipulate a minimum amount, to ensure that each represents a substantial amount of learning. Unit standards will be directly linked to curricula, and will be divided into three categories: knowledge, practical, and workplace standards.

What is not clear from the available official documentation, which is not yet finalized, is what the term 'unit standard' means here, and what the role of learning outcomes are, if there are specified curriculum. It appears that 'unit standard' may be closer to what is usually described as a 'module', and that learning outcomes are seen as guides for the development of curricula, but not as defining documents, in the same was as they were in the original NQF. What is not clear, then, is why outcomes need to be separately specified at all, and indeed, whether they will be. Another significant difference, which brings the QCTO model closer to the Umalusi model, is that a national assessment will be specified for each qualification. This can be seen as a reaction to the extremely varied standards of assessment that took place against the unit standards registered on the NQF, as well as the extremely labour- and cost-effective requirements for moderation if all assessment is site-based and designed and conducted by individual assessors (the problems with this idea of quality assurance is briefly discussed further below).

Also proposed is an entry assessment for all occupational qualifications, in which learners have to demonstrate their competence in mathematics and language. This is based on a lack of faith in the formal education system, and weak levels of mathematics and language ability that many learners have, despite having school leaving certificates. Learners who do, and are not found competent, will have to take additional courses, and be found competent before an occupational qualification will be awarded.

Two types of qualifications are proposed: National Occupational Awards, and National Skills Certificates. There is a proposal to have only one qualification per occupation, in a move away from the proliferation of qualifications on the original NQF.

It seems as if, like the original NQF, it is dependent on a range of institutions that need to be created, such as External Assessment Quality Partners. However, there is a clear move to institutionalize assessment, and move away from the notion of purely individual assessors.

It's not over 'til it's over: Version 2.1 or 3.0?

However, just when it looked as if the lengthy period of no resolution had ended, things have changed again. A new President was sworn into office in May 2009, and he announced a new Cabinet, with substantial changes for education and training. Instead of a single Minister of education, there is now a Minister of Basic Education, and a Minister of Higher Education and Training. Skills development has been moved from the Ministry of Labour to the Minister of Higher Education and Training. The entire proposed QCTO is now no longer within the Department of Labour (requiring still more legislative changes). Whether this means substantial changes to version 2.0 of the NQF remains to be seen.

A major point of contention has been that the proposed occupational framework[83] will cover all ten levels on the NQF. How this will relate to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), and what an occupational doctorate means in practice, has yet to be

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[83] http://www.labour.gov.za [10 June 2009].

seen. Until now, higher education has resisted this. The new structural configuration may provide opportunities to address this problem.

Another point of contention has been the separation of vocational and occupational education: what do the terms really mean, can these two things be separated, and how will it work in practice? Given the intractable debates between the two Ministries, it could be suggested that this separation has had more to do with giving each Ministry a patch in which to play, than based on meaningful analysis of what occupational education is, and how it should work. The Department of Labour was clear that the occupational framework excludes qualifications which lead to professional designations and are subject to specific legislation, and excludes qualifications which include work-integrated learning and are registered on one of the other frameworks[84]. Concern has been expressed that the new NQF, consisting of three linked NQFs (none of which operate according to the original design), represents a step backward for the vision of integration and parity of esteem, as the gulf between occupational and other qualifications seemed larger than ever. It is to be hoped that the movement of the trades and occupational framework to the new Ministry of Higher Education and Training can bring them together.

SAQA has issued a statement that all qualifications are deemed formally registered until 2012. It is envisaged that in this period, the new structures and systems to oversee qualifications will start to replace the qualifications currently on the framework.

What the South Africa NQF looks like now (June 2009)

Anyone who looks at the framework on the SAQA website will simply see a list of many thousands of registered qualifications, and 10,258 unit standards.[85] This is a mixture of provider qualifications and the new unit-standards based qualifications which were developed through SAQA's structures. Provider qualifications make up 7,092 of these qualifications, and there are 787 qualifications developed through SAQA's standards generating processes (Isaacs 2009).

The distinction between the two types of qualifications on the NQF is important. The one was those developed by institutions, and the other, those developed through the structures of SAQA. This distinction is not immediately apparent.This distinction is not immediately apparent, and because this difference is not made explicit, it also creates the impression that the NQF is something different to what it is. In this sense, though, the NQF as captured on the SAQA website is a register of qualifications. It is important to emphasize that publicly available information creates the impression that the NQF largely operates according to its original design, whereas clearly, this is not the case. For whatever reasons - and some suggestions are made below - the idea of structures created outside of educational institutions setting learning outcomes as the basis for curriculum development and assessment simply is not the reality in South Africa today.

In another sense, the NQF is the three linked frameworks. The higher education framework is a framework of qualification types. This is what qualifications frameworks seem to look like in many other countries - it gives nomenclature of the available qualifications in higher education, and shows how they relate to each other. The specific qualifications offered by specific institutions fit within these types of qualifications.

[84] http://www.labour.gov.za [11 June 2009].

[85] http://www.saqa.org.za [4 June 2009].

Umalusi is developing a framework of the qualifications that it certifies. Each qualification is linked to a specific curriculum, and is assessed at least in part through an assessment which is external to the individual sites (schools and colleges) in which teaching and learning takes place. As has been discussed above, the trades and occupational framework has been proposed as a framework of occupational awards and skills awards linked to specific curricula and assessment requirements. It remains to be seen how the Ministry of Higher Education and Training takes this forward.

5. Impact and achievements

SAQA's impact analysis

SAQA is arguably one of the few organizations in the world that has attempted a full-scale impact assessment of the NQF for which it was responsible. This took the form of a large and ambitious project which initiated by SAQA in 2003, called the *NQF impact study*. It was developed as a long-term longitudinal study, with a series of cycles. The first cycle tried to establish criteria against which to measure the progress of the NQF. Seventeen indicators were established.

The second cycle tried to establish a baseline against which to measure progress. The 17 indicators were used to develop a survey questionnaire which was administered to a sample of stakeholders. Interviews and focus group meetings were held. An analysis of the qualifications and unit standards registered on the NQF was conducted, and a qualitative analysis of qualifications in three sectors was conducted by an external contractor. The findings claimed some successes, some mixed successes, and some areas with little evidence of impact. While Cycle Three was supposed to report in 2007, it was delayed, probably because of the changes which were being made to the NQF and because of the realization of problems with the design of the study.

Analyzing impact of any policy is difficult, and in the case of NQFs it seems to be extra difficult. Nonetheless, if a policy is to be advocated, instituted, and supported, it should be possible to provide some evidence about its usefulness, and the extent to which it is achieving or is likely to achieve its objectives. The SAQA impact study is a brave attempt at finding a methodology for achieving this, and it has some interesting findings. Nonetheless, it is widely regarded as rather problematic.

As Higgs and Keevy (2007) suggest, many people saw it as a propaganda exercise on behalf of SAQA. They also point out, as I do elsewhere (Allais 2007b) that a weakness of the study was that it did not question the design of the NQF, or its objectives. I have also pointed out that when interviewing people, the NQF was treated as a single entity - it did not separate the qualifications and unit standards designed through the systems and structures of SAQA from the qualifications of providers. More problematically, the interviews only asked people what they thought: whether or not they thought the NQF had had an impact in the areas mentioned. The findings, therefore, reflect more whether the sample of individuals interviewed thought it was a good idea, than whether it had actually had an impact on those areas. For example, it could be asked what is the value of finding that some stakeholders perceive that the relevance of qualifications has improved, when in fact the new qualifications taken up in such low numbers? Or, what does it mean that individuals interviewed feel that the NQF has had a positive effect on programmes, without an analysis of the programmes which were supposedly affected?

Various commentators (for example, Allais 2007b, Oberholzer 2005) note that the indicators were questionable. For example, one of the claimed successes was the number of qualifications that had been registered on the framework. But whether this was in fact really indicative of meaningful success in meeting the NQF objectives was not questioned. The

methodology was also questioned, as it was primarily based on interviews with selected stakeholders. Thus, even a commentary published by SAQA refers to the impact study as "...in effect a sustained market inquiry into perceptions of the NQF and practices that have emerged around the NQF" (French 2009).

Achievements and non-achievements

What, then, can be said of the achievements and non-achievements of the South African NQF? French (2009) argues that even though the NQF has not been implemented according to the original design, and despite the many problems which have beset it, it has shifted thinking about educational quality, curriculum design, and assessment. Of course a statement like this is extremely difficult to test, and it is also not clear that the consequences of this alleged shift are desirable. It is possible that the amount and quality of workplace training has increased, stimulated by the training levy, and by the NQF. Again, though, this has not been researched. SAQA argues that the existence of the NQF has increased awareness about quality assurance in higher education (Isaacs 2009).

The new NQF seems to have moved more to a model which describes what exists, as opposed to a model which tries to propose what should exist, except for trades and occupational qualifications. This may prove in the long term to be beneficial for South Africans and others.

It is to be hoped that the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) will become an important and useful database for the South African education system, although many teething problems have been experienced. Clearly, it is an area that SAQA sees as important for its future, and on which places much emphasis and energy.

However, even the most ardent supporters concede that the NQF has not achieved its ambitious and widely-supported objectives. Why this is the case is discussed very briefly in the following section. For now, the non-achievements (I do not refer to them as failures, as they do not necessarily reflect the failure of the NQF *per se*), are briefly considered.

Clearly, the Government Departments which were responsible for the NQF have not viewed the original model and its associated design features as viable, and, as has been seen above, have dramatically changed them. Of course, this could always be attributed to motives other than objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of policy (as is discussed further below). Clearly, the institutional arrangements failed, for a range of complicated reasons. One of the less-disputed ones is the complexity of the initial arrangements for quality assurance, and the large numbers of bodies.

Certainly levels of take-up of the new qualifications which were developed are still very low. In other words, the new qualifications that were created and registered on the framework did not result in a rush of educational programmes designed against them. So, for example, SAQA's 2007/2008 Annual Report says that there are 20 million qualification awards recorded on its NLRD, and only 27,425 of these are against new qualifications, submitted by 16 Sectoral Quality Assurance bodies, against 180 qualifications. This is out of a total of 787 new qualifications which have been registered on the NQF (Isaacs 2009). This means that many hundreds of qualifications which were developed have never been taught, assessed against, or awarded[86]. Whatever the reasons may be (and some are

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[86] In 2007, 172 unit-standards based qualifications and 2,211 unit standards had awards made against them to a total of 37,841 and 562,174 learners respectively (many of these will be to the same

discussed in the next section), this can only be seen as a failure of the model. In addition, 130 qualifications which were registered on the NQF were allowed to lapse after their official term ended, signalling that no one was interested in offering them, and 2,013 unit standards similarly elapsed, although some were replaced.

The Senior Certificate, awarded to successful candidates at the end of senior secondary school, was widely criticized by universities and industry. Nonetheless, it continued to be the main qualification that young and old South Africans tried to achieve. Its replacement, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), seems set to continue this trend. This seems to imply that despite its problems which are undeniable, and despite the involvement of industry representatives in the creation of the new qualifications, South Africans have yet to be convinced that the proposed alternatives - enrolling in the new NQF-developed outcomes-based qualifications - are better.

SAQA's research in 2005 found that the NQF had had "...minimal positive impact or a mix of positive and negative impact" with regard to portability of qualifications (SAQA 2005, p. 45), and that the NQF had not facilitated credit accumulation and transfer (SAQA 2006). A more recent report produced for the OECD found that recognition of prior learning is not widely implemented, and has taken place only in small pockets (Blom, Parker, and Keevy 2007).

Education and skills levels in South Africa remain very low, and various new Government initiatives have been created to attempt to kick-start skills training. Certainly South Africa's education system remains extremely unequal, and very weak in areas - South African pupils continue to score very poorly on international assessment tests; way below pupils in poorer African countries. The numbers of learners enrolled in vocational programmes at secondary level remain low compared to those in the school system. Clearly, these problems cannot be put at the door of the NQF. It is now widely acknowledged that the objectives of the NQF were too ambitious and that at best, the NQF could be seen as a mechanism which could contribute to the achievement of its objectives (RSA Departments of Education and Labour 2002, 2003; Isaacs 2009). South Africa's educational problems are severe and deep-seated, and any attempts to improve them are going to take a generation to show real results. Defenders of the NQF would argue that it could have made much more of a contribution to them had it been given greater political support, power, and resources. I have argued the reverse - that the NQF has in fact obstructed the achievement of its objectives, primarily by its unwieldy qualifications and unit standards and the dysfunctional quality assurance models which emerged, but also because of how the NQF claimed to be able to solve or at least contribute to the solution of problems, and was positioned as a system that would drive an increase in provision and an improvement in quality, implicitly obviating the need for the State to build and develop educational institutions (Allais 2007a). The existence of the NQF also represents an opportunity-cost in terms, and resources, energy, and focus were diverted away from building institutions, particularly with regard to vocational and workplace education.

learners - the figures reflect the total number of awards, not the number of awards per learner). Data was supplied by the SAQA NLRD.

6. Analysis and lessons

How can the achievements and problems be understood and analyzed, and what lessons can be drawn from them?

Politics, power, and the economy

Qualifications clearly wield considerable power in any country, and Government attempts to use qualifications to drive educational reform reflect an attempt to shift the priorities of that power. Clearly, deeply embedded power relations are at stake, and may prove difficult to dislodge or even shift. In a discussion document for this project, Young and I (Young and Allais 2009) argue that this embeddedness of qualifications in historically-embedded power is not just an arbitrary product of history; there are real reasons why in most countries qualifications have not been separated from educational institutions where they are achieved (whether individual universities, or government education systems like school systems with centralized curricula) if they are to retain their value.

Official publications of SAQA, as well as presentations and publications by its staff, have argued that difficulties experienced in implementation are indicative primarily of power struggles between the two sponsoring departments and a lack of political and financial support from these departments (for example, Heyns and Needham 2004; SAQA 2004b; 2005a; Isaacs 2006; Keevy 2006; Isaacs 2004).

More specifically, lack of political support from the Department of Education has been attributed by some commentators as one of the causes of many of the difficulties experienced in the implementation of the South African NQF (e.g. French 2009). I have argued elsewhere (2007b) that during the period of policy reviews, the Department of Education made various decisions that could be seen as undermining or even unraveling the NQF, despite the lack of official pronouncement on its future. It could be argued that this started as early as 2001, when the General and Further Education and Training Act (No. 58 of 2001) was passed, creating Umalusi as a quality assurance body that did not have to be accredited by SAQA, and did not accredit learning programmes against NQF-registered qualifications. Certainly, this undermined SAQA's model for the NQF. This does not mean, though, that it represents malice or power politics on behalf of the Department of Education. I have argued, in research published by Umalusi, that the Department of Education insisted on a more viable and reliable approach to quality assurance in the institutions for which it had a direct responsibility (Allais et al. 2007).

A minor, but telling, anecdote illustrates the attitude of at least some people in the Department of Education towards SAQA: qualifications for school teachers which had been developed by SAQA's Standards Generating Body (SGB), ratified by the National Standards Body (NSB), and registered by SAQA, were not approved by the Department of Education for programme funding in universities that wanted to offer them, because the qualifications were seen to differ from official departmental policy (Allais 2005).

Some see the problems as a consequence of the over-bureacratization of the NQF by SAQA, as well as power struggles between the two departments (Jansen 2004; Keevy 2006). Lugg (2007) argues that the rupture within the NQF reflects the different and contradictory constructions of the Departments of Education and Labour, and predicts that while the State remains thus conflicted, the practices of the NQF will as well. Mukora (2006) attributes the problems to the origins of the NQF in the dying apartheid State's education and industrial policies, notwithstanding its support from the trade unions. He argues that the post-Fordist model on which it was premised is not applicable to the South African economy.

Transparency

Various researchers have pointed out the problems of over specification and over elaboration that result from attempts to specify learning outcomes separately from educational institutions and curricula (Wolf 1995; Hall and Woodhouse 1999). This is because of the assumption that learning outcomes can be transparent - and therefore, that they can set a clear standard, which people will design curricula from, teach from, and assesses to, in a reasonably similar manner. This assumption may hold true when there are very strong educational institutions with skilled professionals staffing them, who have strong networks and relationships with each other and with industry, but in such cases the outcomes will be very general and quality will be insured in other words through professional judgement (there is still another problem, which I will address below). In other words, the standards *per se* are not transparent, but they specify enough that they can be interpreted within specific communities or professional groups. As Guthrie points out,

> … the assumption that human capabilities can be unequivocally described and accurately communicated by means of language is unfounded. So, at best, written competency standards are rough and ready, though useful, guides, and we should be wary of assuming that actual realities of what competence is are reflected in the words used to describe them. Therefore it is not the words that are important but what they *mean*, and the extent to which what they mean is widely *understood*. This intangible nature of competence can present particular challenges – one of the most significant of which is its assessment. This is because there is a tendency to concentrate more on the tangible and the overt and less on the underlying (but possibly more critical) attributes of competence (Harris et al. 1995). (Guthrie 2009)

In the absence of standards being widely understood within the community of professionals, and trusted by the broader community - in other words, in the absence of teachers and assessors already having a good sense of what the standard is - outcome statements do not help, because they are open to very different interpretations. In order to attempt to contain these differences, outcome developers make them more and more specific - but in the process, they get narrower and narrower, and also, longer and longer, and consequently more difficult for curriculum designers, teachers, and assessors, to work with. And, at the same time, they never become transparent. I have demonstrated (Allais 2007b) the extreme form which this took in the South African NQF, down to the much-quoted learning outcome on how to wash your hands. Many of the unit standards registered on the South African NQF are extremely narrow, and nearly all of them are lengthy. This can be seen as one explanation of the low take-up of the NQF-designed qualifications - the sheer practical difficulty of working with such a system.

This critique is not accepted by all. French (2009) argues, for example, that while my research demonstrates that many unit standards are absurd, it ignores the good ones which have been developed. My argument, on the other hand, is that the design is inherent to unit standards. But whether or not some unit standards are well designed, or are used in specific contexts, it is certainly the case in South Africa that the changes to the NQF have all moved away from the idea of outcomes specified outside of curricula and educational institutions. But even in countries where there are strong institutions and groupings of professionals, and where there are understandings of what the competency-standards or outcomes *mean*, critiques have been made of standards-based models. For example, Australian training packages, widely seen as an example of a successful competency-based training system, have been criticized for being too detailed and unwieldy (Guthrie 2009).

Some researchers have gone further, and argue that a narrow outcomes-based or competency-based approach undermines the knowledge base of educational programmes. Attempting to use this type of approach in general education leads to knowledge being fragmented or undermined, as disciplines and knowledge areas cannot be captured in outcome statements, and cannot be read off them (Allais 2007b; Taylor 2000; Muller 2004). Others have shown how craft knowledge can be similarly undermined by being fragmented into learning outcomes (Gamble 2002, 2004), and that a narrow outcomes or

competency-based approach can lead to workers getting narrow and limiting education (Gamble 2005, Wheelahan 2008a).

Clearly, any educational programme contains a notion of learning outcomes, and a notion of competence is key to many educational programmes, particularly vocational and professional qualifications, as well as workplace training. However, it may be that using a notion of competence or learning outcomes in a more iterative way in curriculum development, instead of assuming that competences can be specified on their own, is more useful. This would imply relationships with industry at the level of curriculum development, as well as with educational institutions, instead of focusing on industry involvement through standards setting.

Quality assurance

As was discussed above, there has been agreement that the quality assurance model implied by the NQF is incredibly complex and costly. Umalusi's research has demonstrated serious problems with the quality assurance model that was adopted under the NQF (Allais et al. 2007), showing that the problem was not just that there were too many quality assurance bodies, and that their relationships with each other were not clear enough. It was also that a model of decentralized, institution-based assessment needs to rest on very strong institutions and a culture within which schools and not just elite schools are widely recognized as being serious about standards. For universities, this may prove to be viable in South Africa, if it is accompanied by considerable support and development to the weaker universities which were systematically underfunded by the apartheid State. It may well be that in other countries with better developed and more equal education systems, it is also possible at lower levels of the education system. The original model of the NQF assumed that all assessment could be designed and conducted at each individual site, even for schools and colleges. But South African institutions are of wildly divergent standards, and Umalusi's very small survey of assessment practices proved them to be dramatically divergent. In other words, the outcome statements, notwithstanding all their detailed specifications, were not sufficient to 'hold the standard', to ensure that all assessment was at the same or a similar level.

To solve or tackle the problem of low quality through a system of quality assurance would have required an army of moderators, with extensive subject expertise in the appropriate fields (the very thing which is missing in South Africa), as well as expertise in assessment, and thousands of similarly equipped verifiers to check up on the work of each moderator. But clearly, no country wants to spend more on quality assurance than it spends on provision. So South Africa seems to have attempted to tackle this problem differently - by greater centralized curriculum prescription, and centralized assessments which are external to the individual sites of teaching and learning.

While registration and accreditation processes are important, they proved costly, time consuming, and ultimately ineffective, in the absence of more traditional quality measures such as prescribed curricula and centrally-set assessments, outside of the university system.

A final speculation

The NQF was a creature of its time - the idea of it was picked up as a solution to many complex educational problems, but perhaps it is trying to solve the wrong problems. In South Africa, it was trying to increase access to education and training by ensuring pathways between certificates, and that people who have gained skills in everyday life can get certificates for them. But South Africans cannot access educational institutions because they do not have money to pay fees; because workplaces do not want to offer training to their staff; because children head households where parents have died from AIDS-related diseases; because children do not have enough to eat; because there is no safe, efficient, and

reasonably-priced public transport in South Africa; and many other reasons along these lines. When South Africans do gain access to education, in many instances they find schools which are ill-equipped, teachers who are poorly trained and motivated, many university lecturers who never publish research and so on (obviously with major exceptions, as discussed in the introductory session). When learners leave educational institutions, jobs are not readily available, except for a small minority of highly-skilled professionals.

Clearly, qualifications cannot solve these problems. Many of them are problems which the South African Government is trying to solve through a range of different complex interventions. But I would argue that until the daily realities of people's lives improve; until the quality of educational institutions improves; and until the economy starts to significantly create jobs (and obviously these things are linked to each other); putting energy and effort into a framework of qualifications does not seem to be an important priority. That a qualifications framework can play a significant role in solving these problems seems, from the South African experience, to be doubtful. It is to be hoped that the new institutional configuration will allow it to occupy a more realistic position within South African education policy.

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Appendices for South Africa

Appendix I: Levels and fields of the original South Africa NQF

	Fields											
Levels	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Agriculture and Nature Conservation	Culture and Arts	Business, Commerce and Management Studies	Communication Studies and Language	Education, Training and Development	Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology	Human and Social Studies	Law, Military Science and Security	Health Science and Social Services	Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences	Services	Physical Planning and Construction

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Appendix 2: Original structures and processes designed for standards setting, quality assurance, and provision

Ministers of Education and Labour	**Minister of Labour**	**Minister of Education**

SAQA

The SAQA Authority was to 'register' unit standards and qualifications, thereby making them officially part of the NQF.

The original idea was that SAQA would accredit the quality assurance bodies—the 'guardian of the guardians'.

Quality assurance bodies were to check that the learners which the providers have taught and assessed have in fact obtained the stipulated outcomes (through a sample of learners).

The NQF

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

Quality Assurance

(General, vocational, higher)

The Higher Education Quality Council and the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training were to accredit institutions to offer a qualification or unit standard in higher education or general and further education respectively.

Quality Assurance (occupational)

25 Education and Training Quality Assurance Authorities were to accredit institutions to offer qualifications and programmes within their sectors of the economy.

National Standards Bodies were to ratify the unit standards and qualifications, to ensure that the interests of different constituencies are addressed.

Standards Generating Bodies were to design unit standards and qualifications composed of outcome statements.

Providers could then design and offer a learning programme against these unit standards or qualifications, or conduct assessment against these standards. But in order to do so, they were to apply and obtain 'accreditation' from a quality assurance body.

Assessors could assess against these standards. But in order to do so, they were to be registered by a quality assurance body. It was not clear what the awarding body would be.

Appendix 3: Qualifications and Unit Standards developed through the South African NQF[87]

Examples of new qualifications, levels 2 to 5

Examples of level 2 qualifications

National Certificate: Retail Shop Floor Practices
Certificate: Reception Operations and Services
National Certificate in Steel Tube and Pipe Manufacturing (Seamless Hot-Finished or Welded or Cold-Formed)
National Certificate: Air-conditioning, Refrigeration and Ventilation (also at level 3)
National Certificate: Bread and Flour Confectionary Baking
National Certificate: Contact Centre Support
National Certificate: Macadamia production and de-husking
National Certificate: Victim Empowerment and Support

Examples of level 3 qualifications

National Certificate in Quality Checking of Tyres and Tyre Components
National Certificate: Beauty Technology
National Certificate: Cigarette Filter Rod Production
National Certificate: Construction Painting
National Certificate: Fast Food Services
National Certificate: Fast Food Services
National Certificate: Food and Beverage Processing: Oil and Fat Based Product Processing
National Certificate: Jewellery Manufacture in a Mass Production Environment
National Certificate: Seed Processing and Packaging

Examples of level 4 qualifications

National Certificate: Community-Based Language Practice
Further Education and Training Certificate: Manufacturing and Assembly Operations Supervision
Further Education and Training Certificate: Craft Enterprise
National Certificate: Food and Beverage Manufacturing Technology: Spray Dried Food Product Technologist
Further Education and Training Certificate: Real Estate
Further Education and Training Certificate: Pipeline Operations
Further Education and Training Certificate: Victim Empowerment Co-ordination
Further Education and Training Certificate: Community Facilitation in Society and Environment Interactions

Examples of level 5 qualifications

National Certificate: Resolving of Crime
National Diploma: Animal Production
National Certificate: Emergency Services Operations
National Certificate: Maintenance of High-speed Production Processes (Fast-moving Consumer Goods)
National Diploma: Footwear Technology
Nation al Certificate: Information Technology: Systems Support

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[87] http://www.saqa.org.za [11 Oct. 2009].

Examples of level 1 unit standards

Sweep floors (four credits)
Services: Personal Care

Apply basic fire fighting techniques (three credits)
Services: Transport, Operations and Logistics

Collect a representative groundnut sample (two credits)
Agriculture and Nature Conservation: Secondary Agriculture

Recognize emergency on the farm (seven credits)
Agriculture and Nature Conservation: Primary Agriculture

Show, explain, discuss and analyse the relationship between society and natural environment (four credits)
Human and Social Studies: People/Human-Centred Development

Assist a frail care patient to relieve him/herself using a bedpan (two credits)
Services: Cleaning, Domestic, Hiring, Property and Rescue Services

Apply accurate information about HIV & AIDS to everyday life (two credits)
Health Sciences and Social Sciences: Promotive Health and Development Services

Examples of level 2 unit standards

Collect bulk milk from the farm by means of a milk tanker (eight credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Drive a tractor (ten credits)
Agriculture and Nature Conservation: Primary Agriculture

Switch a high voltage inline switch on and off (two credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Fabrication and Extraction

Demonstrate an understanding of climate and weather in the context of renewable energy (six credits)
Physical Planning and Construction: Electrical Infrastructure and Construction

Apply the basic skills of customer service (two credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Finance, Economics and Accounting

Pack customer purchases at point of sales (three credits)
Services: Wholesale and Retail

Prepare, cook and assemble hot filled baked potatoes (one credit)
Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Clean carpets using the dry powder method (six credits)
Services: Cleaning, Domestic, Hiring, Property and Rescue Services

Examples of level 3 unit standards

Cover rich fruit cake for final decoration (three credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Foundry: Manufacture three dimensional regular shaped wooden pattern equipment (40 credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Engineering and Related Design

Describe ideologies in community contexts (ten credits)
Education, Training and Development: Adult Learning

Demonstrate a basic understanding of the causes of falls of ground (two credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Fabrication and Extraction

Demonstrate basic knowledge of computers (six credits)
Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences: Information Technology and Computer Sciences

Respond to hazardous conditions or emergencies (ten credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Engineering and Related Design

Handle and use a shotgun (two credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Safety and Society

Examples of level 4 unit standards

Manufacture a green Mozzarella type cheese from coagulated milk (30 credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Install an ATM (Automated Teller Machine) (five credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Finance, Economics and Accounting

Manage venomous animals (eight credits)
Agriculture and Nature Conservation: Nature Conservation

Demonstrate a fundamental understanding of history, geography, politics and economics as relevant to the South African intelligence context (four credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Sovereignty of the State

Instil in myself a personal marketing culture (four credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Marketing

Commission Very Complex Customer Equipment (ten credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Use knowledge of self to make a life decision in the creative world (five credits)
Culture and Arts: Visual Arts

Apply biblical models of transformation to perceived needs of the community (four credits)
Human and Social Sciences: Religious and Ethical Foundations of Society

Examples of level 5 unit standards

Capture quality sound with a boom microphone (five credits)
Communication Studies and Language: Communication Studies

Prepare, cook and serve food in the restaurant (six credits)
Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Apply fundamental concepts, theories and related values of a selected subject area (15 credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Justice in Society

Demonstrate knowledge of Eastern Africa, Indian Ocean Islands and the maldives [sic] as travel destinations (eight credits)
Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Establish order in the arts and culture learning environment (five credits)
Culture and Arts: Performing Arts

Apply the Arbitration Act in dispute resolution (four credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Human Resources

Examples of level 6 unit standards

Mature and store green beer (10 credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Design a computer application for a single-user personal computer for programming with a 4GL (12 credits)
Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences: Information Technology and Computer Sciences

Study and live holistic Christian Spirituality (12 credits)
Human and Social Studies, Religious and Ethical Foundations of Society

Explain and apply the principles of conceptual thinking (10 credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Marketing

Arrange dance productions (15 credits)
Culture and Arts: Performing Arts

Examples of level 7 unit standards

Analyse global economic structures (10 credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Sovereignty of the State

Draft amendments to banking legislation (37 credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Finance, Economics, and Accounting

Assess marketability of scripts (10 credits)
Communication Studies and Language: Communication Studies

Apply the practical aspects of trial advocacy (19 credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Justice in Society

Examples of unit standards worth only 1 credit each

Maintain basic water quality
Level one, Agriculture and Nature Conservation: Primary Agriculture

Operate a mechanical core drill
Level two, Physical Planning and Construction: Building Construction

Maintain effective working relationships with other members of staff
Level three, Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Procurement

Support and guide the learner
Level four, Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Describe the Regulatory Nuclear Safety requirements as applied in nuclear power generating plant
Level five, Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Apply relevant Gender Law
Level seven, Law, Military Science and Security: Justice in Society

Examples of unit standards worth large amounts of credit

Administer payment of the proceeds of a mortgage loan in a banking environment: (level four, 59 credits)
Business, Commerce and Management Studies: Finance, Economics and Accounting

Crosswork fancy shape diamond gemstones: (level 4, 87 credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Track animals and identify spoor using difficult spoor (level 6, 60 credits)
Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Enhance and develop techniques to cut patterns and designs for footwear ranges (level five, 110 credits)
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology: Manufacturing and Assembly

Produce and present an estimative intelligence product (level 7, 60 credits)
Law, Military Science and Security: Sovereignty of the State

Plan and conduct a guided mountaineering experience (level 7, 60 credits)
Services: Hospitality, Tourism, Travel, Gaming and Leisure

Appendix 4: Proposed new arrangements for the South African NQF, adapted from Heitmann and Mummenthey (2009)

Labour Market

| Dept. of Education | | SAQA New NQF | | QCTO | DoL OFO - NOPF | SETAs Companies |

Provision of workplace-based learning

PROFESSIONAL BODIES

UNIVERSITIES	Doctoral Degree		NQF 10
	Master's Degree	HEQC	NQF 9
	Postgraduate Diploma		NQF 8
	Bachelor Degree		NQF 7
	Advanced Certificate		NQF 6
	Higher Certif. / Advanced NVC		NQF 5

OFO — Internships — Skills Programmes

National Learner Record Database (NLRD)

NSC Grade 12	FET-NVC Level 3	UMALUSI	NQF 4
NSC Grade 11	FET-NVC Level 2		NQF 3
NSC Grade 10	FET-NVC Level 1		NQF 2
			NQF 1

Learnerships

NOPF — Apprenticeships

Senior & Intermediate Phase Grades 4-9	ABCE 4
	ABCE 3
Foundational Grades 1-3	ABCE 2
	ABCE 1

Occupational Experience

Up to NQF Level 1

Legend
ABCE = Adult Basic Certificate of Education
DoL = Dept. of Labour
FET = Further Education Training
HEQC = Higher Education Quality Council
OFO = Organizing Framework for Occupations
NOPF = National Occupational Pathways Framework
NSCs = National Skills Certificates
QCTO = Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SETAs = Sectoral Education & Training Authorities

Chapter 6: Lessons from the first qualifications frameworks

If policy-makers are to learn from policy experiences in other countries, as opposed to attempting to recreate each other's policies through policy borrowing, what can be learnt from these five studies? There are no simple answers to complicated educational questions. Nonetheless, this chapter tries to extract a few important trends and threads that can be seen in the five studies, and to present some lessons which can be learnt from them.

Perhaps the two central messages which must be emphasized is that there is no single right model of NQFs, and that NQFs do not provide quick-fix or simple solutions to the complex problems facing countries in relation to education and employment. The five case studies in this working paper do not provide simple answers for policy-makers looking for 'best practice', 'the best model', or 'the right implementation process'.

Despite these differences, the qualifications frameworks in the study had broadly similar aims. However, their design, implementation processes, and achievements were very different.

1.   Aims, design features, and implementation

Some key findings

- The five NQFs included in this working paper had roughly similar aims, but very different designs and were implemented through very different processes.

- All the frameworks have changed over time, been subject to reviews and criticisms, and been part of an evolving policy process.

- The frameworks based on a 'strong outcomes' model in which a clear separation was attempted between qualifications expressed as outcomes on the one hand, and educational programmes on the other hand, encountered the most problems.

- The New Zealand and South African NQFs were substantially revised in the decade after they were introduced, and the NVQs in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have been modified many times since their original introduction.

- The two frameworks which are the least prescriptive in defining outcomes have encountered the least resistance from stakeholders.

The official aims of the five qualifications frameworks are not very explicit about one of the main roles claimed for qualifications frameworks: that they can increase communication between education and training on the one hand and the workplace on the other, although this was a concern which underpinned all of them. The Scottish framework, in its aims and objectives, refers to improving communication between the education system and the general public, and improving the skills levels of the workforce. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) has an objective to "help with developing flexible pathways which assist people to move easily between education and training sectors and the labour market by providing the basis for recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer and work and life experience. Interestingly, as discussed below, the Scottish framework has been the one in which institutions involved in education (including individual universities, as well as bodies representing universities, schools, and colleges)

have played the strongest role, and employer- or industry-led standards processes have played the smallest role.[88] In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as New Zealand, and South Africa, qualifications frameworks were explicitly a part of increasing employers' voices in education and training, although in South Africa other stakeholders were also emphasized.

The NVQs in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, though, like the Competency-Based Training System (CBT) in Australia, were more explicitly based on the claim that the specification of competencies by industry representatives will ensure not only that employers more easily understand what it is that qualified learners can do, but that educational programmes delivered against these specifications will be appropriate to the needs of the workplace. They aimed to detach the outcomes of qualifications from how they were achieved, in part to break what was seen as a provider monopoly on qualifications, and create an 'open market' of vocational education provision. As Michael Young points out in Chapter 1, this notion of qualifications which were independent from any specific learning programme or institution has proved enduringly popular with policy-makers, and provided the basis for many models of NQFs around the world, and two in this study - New Zealand and South Africa.

A point worth emphasizing from Chapter 1 is that the NVQs were originally envisaged as a limited policy mechanism: to introduce qualifications that could be used to accredit and certify the skills acquired by young people on work experience programmes such as Youth Training. The initial idea was not to design qualifications leading to or accrediting new college-based provision. They were introduced as a response to two problems: there were no existing qualifications that were suitable for those attending Youth Training schemes, and, more broadly, there was general dissatisfaction with the existing system of vocational qualifications, and with the low numbers of the workforce who had qualifications relative to counterparts in continental Europe. The Government wanted to make a break with two elements of existing qualifications design: time serving, which was seen as too controlled by the unions; and the syllabus basis for teaching and assessment, which was seen as too controlled by educational institutions. The idea was extended in New Zealand and South Africa, and seen as a way of achieving broader educational, social, and economic aims.

The NQFs in New Zealand and South Africa tried to use the logic of the NVQs to reform the whole education and training system, in the sense that they tried to break the relationship between institutions and qualifications by specifying learning outcomes for all types of learning, at all levels, and all qualifications in all educational sectors. It was believed that by so doing, the broader purposes of the NQFs (better access, improved labour market outcomes, quality, and so on) could be achieved. In New Zealand, an emphasis was explicitly on marketization and efficiency: creating a system whereby more players could emerge in the training market. In South Africa, the emphasis was on democratization, redress, and equity, but relying on what was essentially the same mechanism.

What the three models shared was an emphasis on qualifications defined in terms of competencies or learning outcomes and independent of specific learning programmes, syllabuses, or educational institutions. The emphasis with the NVQs was on employers specifying the competence statements, while in South Africa the idea was broader:

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[88] Employers have played a larger role in respect of particular sub-frameworks, especially Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SQVs), but the role of employers in this respect has been similar to that of English employers in the NVQs, with similar problems with 'employer engagement'.

stakeholder-based groups were created to do this job. Similarly, in New Zealand, National Standard Bodies were created to develop unit standards which were to be the basis of all qualifications.

As has been seen in the preceding chapters, in all three cases a similar trajectory of implementation occurred. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, NVQs were taken up in a few niche areas, but were heavily criticized by researchers, educational institutions, and even some employers, and have been the subject of successive changes and reviews ever since. In a few niche occupational areas, they have been accepted; the reasons for this in the case of two of these sectors are discussed in Chapter 1. In New Zealand and South Africa, individual components of qualifications (known as unit standards) were also created. In New Zealand, unit standards-based qualifications were introduced into the school system, but in the main they proved to be unworkable, particularly in more academic areas, and were largely replaced. Higher education in New Zealand felt that the new approach to designing qualifications was inappropriate, and withdrew from the process. In South Africa, education institutions (universities and private colleges) submitted their existing qualifications to be registered on the framework, in what was supposed to be an interim measure, until the new qualifications created by the NQF Standard Setting Bodies were available to be used. School and college qualifications were reformed, but not in accordance with the NQF, and both have a curriculum statement which is essentially a syllabus, as well as external examinations, and are centrally managed by the Department of Education. Most of the new qualifications were never used, and those linked to specific providers (either specific universities and colleges or to the Department of Education) continue to be offered.

In both New Zealand and South Africa, criticisms, problems, and general dissatisfaction led to reviews and substantial changes to the NQFs. The New Zealand NQF now forms a small subsection of a broader New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, which is a list of all nationally-recognized qualifications in the country. The unit standards-based qualifications are used, but only for some, not all, vocational education. In South Africa, the NQF was recently split into three sub-frameworks, each of which looks set to operate in very different ways to the original design.

In all three countries, the attempt to create qualifications with no links to syllabuses or educational institutions and processes cannot be said to have been successful. In each country, the most used qualifications are linked to institutions in the case of higher education, or to curriculum statements, and some degree of external assessment in the school and college systems. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as in New Zealand, the outcomes-based qualifications continue to be used by some occupational sectors, in the latter case increasingly in combination with institution-based qualifications. In South Africa, the unit standards-model has been largely abandoned, although the new sub-framework for Trades and Occupations still uses some of the language of the NQF, and a small number of unit standards and unit-standards based qualifications are still being used.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is very different. Unlike the other four, and most NQFs that have been developed subsequently, the AQF does not consist of a grid of levels with level descriptors (this, though, is set to change), but rather simply shows the 15 available types of qualifications in Australia, and how they relate to each other. There is a broad outline of the 'characteristics of learning outcomes' for each qualification, but the nature of each qualification and the process by which it is accredited differs for each sector. Standardized rankings or equivalences between qualifications are explicitly not part of the AQF, as in each sector, as they are seen as being based on different types of learning reflecting the distinctive educational responsibilities of each. The qualifications are not directly linked to institutions, as they are qualification types (such as, diplomas, or bachelor degrees). In this sense, the AQF in its current form is like a more explicit version of a traditional qualifications system. Where the AQF has some commonalities with the NVQs

and with the original New Zealand and South African frameworks is in the processes and systems for managing the vocational education qualifications and in the design of what are known as 'training packages' which are the basis of competency-based training (CBT) qualifications for the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

The NQF in Scotland, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), is different again. Chapter 2 tells the story of an NQF developed over a very long period of time, during which a series of reforms were introduced incrementally for different parts of the system and different levels. The reforms aimed at making the qualifications more flexible, improving links with the labour market, and improving the relationships between qualifications at different levels and for different sectors. The framework was only introduced after over 15 years of reform of qualifications in the various sectors. These reforms led to the development of three separate frameworks, which were finally brought together, with other qualifications, into a single framework. The most powerful groupings in this process were the 'owners' of the two most important sub-frameworks: the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which is responsible for school and college qualifications, and higher education bodies with responsibility for the higher education qualifications. (The SQA is itself the product of the earlier reforms.) These bodies have driven the process of creating the national framework.

The aims of the SCQF need to be understood as building on the aims of previous reforms. These included making delivery more flexible, improving labour market outcomes, progression pathways and credit transfer within as well as between sectors, devolving responsibility for curriculum content, promoting parity of esteem between vocational and academic education, and increasing learning opportunities.

It is important to note that the Scottish framework did not seek to remove control over education and training from professional educators and trainers, as was the intention of the other frameworks, and as many documents advocating frameworks argue should happen. As Chapter 2 makes clear, institutions directly involved in education (the bodies discussed above) dominated the development of the SCQF.

2.   Successes and failures

Some key findings

- The frameworks have had some successes in achieving their goals, but in many cases have experienced considerable difficulties.
- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) has been the most supported by its stakeholders, and is seen as having contributed to other policies in achieving its goals.
- The New Zealand NQF, the South African NQF, and the NVQs in England and Wales substantially failed to achieve their aims, or led to unexpected negative consequences.
- In none of the five countries is there much evidence of improved labour market outcomes or of greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning.

Successes

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is widely recognized as the most successful framework of the five examples reported on in this study, and its successes are important, as is shown in Chapter 2. It should be pointed out, though, that they are modest compared with some of the goals which countries aim to achieve through qualifications frameworks. The study also points out that none of the successes has really been quantified. Nonetheless, they include the following:

- it is *associated with* positive developments in access, progression, and transfer; has contributed to a more transparent and flexible system; and, significantly, has retained support of all sectors of education and training;

- it has introduced a common national 'language' to support access, transfer, and progression, possibly strengthening existing arrangements or making them easier to use;

- it has been used to some extent in the recognition of prior learning;

- Careers Scotland has to some extent used the SCQF to support its work. Employers and professional bodies have used the framework for recruitment as well as planning and organizing training provision, but so far, total activity has been small, and tended to arise out of specific needs. Similar use has been made of it in adult education and other niche areas; and

- it provides a context for policy development and ongoing qualification reform.

Although many of its successes are at least partially attributable to prior reforms, it was only when the different frameworks were brought together within a single comprehensive framework that the range of current *uses* of the framework become available. And the SCQF's successes have been as an instrument rather than a driver of change - a tool to be used or not depending on other policies and incentives.

The Australian study similarly suggests that bringing different education systems together in a single framework can improve pathways between systems, and highlight where the problems with pathways are. In addition, the Australian NQF:

- has played an important role in building a national vocational education system with strong industry links;

- can also be seen as having controlled the proliferation of different qualifications, which would have added greater complexity to sectoral provision and created difficulties for businesses, parents, and students in understanding qualifications; and

- has contributed to providing national consistency to VET and higher education qualifications.

In New Zealand, the accreditation system created through the outcomes-based qualification model was seen as successful in terms of leading to the emergence of new providers.

Mixed or qualified successes

Creating new qualifications based on learning outcomes or competence statements, and populating qualifications frameworks with these qualifications, is claimed as an achievement in official documentation cited in some of the studies. However, whether or not this is an achievement is questionable. The South African NQF, the NVQ model in England and Wales, as well as the original New Zealand NQF, the South African NQF, and the Australian Competency-Based Training (CBT) system for vocational education, all have many qualifications (in instances the majority of qualifications) which have never been taken up by any providers or assessors, and remain merely 'on the framework', or, as in the Australian case, accredited against the framework.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the NVQ model can be seen as successful in some 'niche' areas, although they did not become a model for all vocational qualifications, as originally envisaged. Two of these 'niche' areas were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. It is important to note that the chapter shows how in the two successes described, one relied on learning opportunities beyond those specified by NVQs and the other is attributed to lack of compliance with the NVQ model, as opposed to being evidence of the model's success.

Qualifications frameworks can be seen as playing some facilitating role in improving pathways, although they do not replace institution-to-institution partnerships and multi-institutional arrangements. In Scotland, the framework itself has not created new pathways between the three main sub-frameworks; it has merely provided a tool for doing so. Chapter 2 argues that different dimensions of flexibility - such as flexible delivery and flexible learning pathways - were in tension with each other and that gains in terms of parity of esteem of different qualifications have been limited. The Australian framework has to a limited extent provided the basis for dialogue between sectors and has been used to underpin credit transfer agreements and pathways. The perception in government is that this has not gone far enough. There are still difficulties with progression between some qualifications. The South African NQF is said by some of the commentators referenced in the study to have achieved 'shifts in attitudes'.

Labour market outcomes

Do employers value the new qualifications? Do learners get jobs? Is their performance better? Governments want to induce employers/industry to invest in education and training, and to lead it (to make sure it addresses their needs) and assume that these two things will reinforce each other. Qualifications frameworks, and particularly, outcomes-based or competence-based training (CBT) models, are seen as a way of doing this. What can be learnt from the present five case studies? This issue is considered at some length, as it is of particular interest to the ILO. However, the lessons are not straightforward, as the countries themselves did not have clear evaluation criteria, and it is very difficult to separate causal factors. Some small successes can be seen.

In all countries there is some evidence of increased involvement of employers in defining qualifications and identifying valuable knowledge and skills. However, there is no indication of whether or not employers then use and trust the new NQF qualifications more than the old ones, and some indications that they do not, except in very specific fields. In all countries, participation of employers is mixed, with more success in some areas than others.

Government in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland hoped that because employers 'owned' the new qualifications, they would take responsibility for using them to assess their employees, and would use them in recruitment and placement of employees. In practice, many employers did not want to get involved, and in many industries, continued to rely on more traditional qualifications.

It seems from these studies as if employers do not behave as policy-makers desire/assume they will. For example, by 2002 in New Zealand, 45 per cent of employees were not covered by an Industry Training Organization. This was either because many employers did not believe that the Industry Training Organization met their needs, or because they relied on the university system to regulate qualifications (i.e. employers had faith in the formal education system, and not the new qualifications, despite them being so-called "industry-led"). In many instances, industry was reluctant to be involved in training which could lead to demands for higher wages. The New Zealand study points out that many firms do not seem to see improving the skill of their lower-level workers as part of their competitive strategy and that many areas of the labour market do not require such workers to have high levels of skills; this is probably an issue which applies to all five countries.

There is some evidence that even where industry does play a strong role, industry-led systems have mixed reactions from industry (which is, of course, very heterogenous in all countries). For example, the case study on Australia cites research suggesting that while those employers who use the vocational education and training (VET) system report that they are satisfied with the results, some employers, particularly in small- and medium-

enterprises, find the system too complex. It is suggested that they do not all value formal qualifications in the same way as the VET sector does.

For example, the Australian study quotes research showing that employers do not value qualifications in the same way that the VET sector does, and indicates that developers are "not in touch with the need of industry".

Only in England and South Africa were Ministries of Labour/Department of Employment directly responsible (jointly with the Ministry of Education in South Africa) for the NQF. This has now changed in South Africa, and the NQF is entirely under the Minister of Higher Education and Skills. In Australia and Scotland there is some role for government bodies concerned with employment[89]. The Scottish Government has seen the NQF as an instrument for focusing attention on the demand and utilization of skills rather than supply.

There are no specific data in any of the countries that show that qualifications frameworks have improved the match of supply and demand between educational institutions and the labour market, or that qualifications frameworks have raised the qualifications levels of the workforce, or led to more appropriate skills and knowledge being obtained by learners. The Australian study suggests that tighter regulation of occupations would have a greater role in the former. Some limited (small scale) achievements in certification of prior or experiential learning could be seen as contributing to the latter.

This does not mean that there are no successes or no progress at all. But where there have been gains, the extent to which they have been achieved by NQFs is questionable. For example, in Scotland vocational qualifications were aligned more closely with labour market needs through prior reforms, and colleges have a tradition of access and responsiveness to employer and individual needs, with courses varying in length, mode of delivery, content, and level. This is despite the fact that promoting employer engagement in education, training, and skills development remains a challenge. Chapter 1 argues that the NVQ 'successes' have been based in one instance on strong human resource development policies in the workplace which included many training opportunities based on good relationships with local education institutions, and in the other instance, strong professional bodies which influence qualification design and maintain examinations based assessment.

The SCQF is used extensively in some occupational and professional areas such as health service and banking, for example to give exemption from qualification requirements. There is some use of the framework by employers and professional bodies for recruitment, and to plan and organize training provision. However, these developments have not been quantified.

Problems and failures

The NVQs in England and Wales are widely seen as a problematic model, and have been changed many times since their introduction. One of the consequences of the NVQ model in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland was to perpetuate and even accentuate a

[89] The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) comes under the purview of the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), but it is located within a component of the Department responsible for education.

view of vocational qualifications as inherently inferior to those obtained at school or university.

The South African NQF can be seen as the framework which encountered the most difficulties. There are very few concrete achievements to show. Many qualifications were created, but very few used. Providers in the main continued offering old qualifications which were institutionally based (particularly at higher education level), or defined through Department of Education-linked syllabuses, with time-bound requirements, and externally-set examinations. The framework was entirely changed, and all the associated mechanisms for determining standards and monitoring and maintaining quality have also been changed.

The New Zealand framework was also totally changed, but the original model survived as part of a broader register of qualifications, which is a list of all nationally-recognized qualifications in the country. An Industry Training Act links industry-based training and assessment to the standards and qualifications of the NQF.

Leesa Wheelahan argues in Chapter 4 on Australia that the AQF can be seen as entrenching sectoral divides, because VET qualifications are output driven, based on Competency-Based Training (CBT), whereas higher education qualifications are based on academic requirements established through shared understandings of syllabuses, processes of learning, assessment, and outcomes.

Understanding the successes and failures

Some key findings

- Qualifications touch on many power relations in society, and qualifications frameworks are likely to result in contestation.

- Incremental implementation seems to have the highest chance of success.

- There are very different ways of designing and implementing qualifications frameworks, and different ways of thinking about qualifications frameworks. NQFs which look similar on paper can be very different in practice.

- The case studies raise serious concerns about the international trend towards learning outcomes-led policies.

- Qualifications frameworks are not static, and there is no single model.

Some patterns can be seen in the developments in the five countries, and also some exceptions. It may be significant to note the obvious: that the first five NQFs, and the models of NQFs which have spread to many other countries, emanate from five English-speaking Commonwealth countries which influenced each other and which have education systems with a partly shared history.

All five case studies highlight that qualifications, particularly those which relate to university entrance or entrance to professions, are high-stakes issues which touch on many power relations in society, and that introducing qualifications frameworks therefore inevitably results in conflicts and disagreements. It is perhaps partly because of this that the incremental approach in the development of the Scottish framework was successful - key educational role-players were in most instances kept on board and felt that they were in charge of processes. The strengths of the Scottish model are that it built on other reforms; that it was driven by key stakeholders from within the education system, and especially from higher education; and that it was seen as an enabling instrument which could be used by bodies involved in change, but not as an agent of change in its own right. This was aided by the fact that Scotland is a small country and has a small and relatively homogenous policy community. It is interesting to note that this education-led, incremental model claims more successes in being used for employment purposes than the three outcomes-based

models which attempted to use industry-specified standards; only in Australia is there some evidence of success of the strongly employer-led models.

In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, governments tried to use outcomes-based qualifications frameworks to shift what was seen as 'provider culture' or a 'provider captured' system, to a 'user-led' marketized system. This was based on commitments to neo-liberal market policies and principles. In South Africa, this was not always apparent as the neo-liberal goals of the NQF were to some extent masked by the strong discourse of redress, equality, and democratization. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, on the other hand, the neo-liberal goals were more explicit, as government was directly trying to undermine trade unions - Young argues in Chapter 2 that this was the basis for opposition to time-linked apprenticeships, which were seen as union-controlled. Governments wanted increased provision, as well as competitiveness and efficiency, through what is essentially a marketization mechanism. In Australia, unions were a key part of the process that led to the establishment of the qualifications framework, but even here policy aimed to explicitly develop a market in education, and 'industry-led' competency-based qualifications that were independent of educational providers in vocational education and training. Here Scotland is the outlier - although it has not been free from neo-liberal influence, it has a stronger tradition of free public provision of education.

In other ways, South Africa is the outlier; it is the only developing country among the five 'early starters'. It has by far the weakest economy, lowest industrial base, weakest education system, and lowest skills levels. In this sense, the difficulties encountered by the South African NQF could perhaps be seen as inevitable, given the extreme challenges it faced, and the very high expectations placed on it.

The studies all emphasize that institutions in each country have a logic of their own, which the NQF may come into conflict with. For this and other reasons, 'policy breadth' - having other policies which also attempt to lead to the aims of the NQF, and support or enable the NQF to play its role and achieve its aims - is important.

Assessment and certification are important drivers of education systems, and NQFs need to be developed bearing this in mind. The model (as in the South African NQF and NVQs) of individual assessors and verifiers turned out to be complicated and unwieldy, and was not successful in guaranteeing reliability and quality. In many instances, examinations have been returned to. In New Zealand, various problems were raised with standards-based assessment, as parents were worried that it would lower standards by reducing student motivation to achieve, and examinations were reintroduced.

The role of stakeholders is a tricky notion and often masks more overtly-political priorities. One of the things shown clearly by the Scottish and South African studies is that bodies set up to administer and develop a qualifications framework, or sub-framework, become stakeholders in their own right - with the accompanying vested interests and so on.

Outcomes and competencies

Claims about the role of learning outcomes in reforming qualifications and thereby education systems are at the heart of NQFs. It is useful, therefore, to reflect on what light the five studies shed on this matter, and how they can explain the relative successes and failures of the frameworks in question.

Firstly, it is important to point out that all qualifications are in some sense concerned with outcomes - because they represent, as Young points out in Chapter 1, a statement about what the holder knows and can do, and are an outcome of *learning*. Educational 'outcomes' - such as, how many people have qualified to become engineers in a particular

year in a particular country, or what the graduation or throughput rate of a particular institution is, or what levels of mathematical ability are obtained by school students - are obviously of concern to all governments. However, there is considerable slippage in policy documentation from this broad notion of outcomes to the much more specific uses, which can be seen in some of the studies in this working paper. This issue is discussed extensively in the partner to this publication, Employment Working Paper No. 44: *Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues* (Allais et al. 2009).

As was discussed above, three of the frameworks in the current studies attempted to completely separate qualifications from educational institutions and processes through the specification of learning outcomes in the qualifications. It was hoped that by so doing, a clear notion of what the bearer of the qualification was qualified to do would be apparent to all. The case studies raise serious concerns about this approach, and should be carefully read by policy-makers wanting to take countries down similar roads. A few points are briefly mentioned here.

One of the problems worth emphasizing is that when outcome or competence statements are separated from learning programmes or syllabuses, they tend to proliferate over-specified, detailed, unwieldy, narrow documents which are supposed to be the basis for assessment. This often results in them not being used at all, and where they are used, leads to narrow forms of assessment leading to fragmented learning experiences. This is linked to the low take-up of such qualifications in general and particularly at higher levels, and is demonstrated in the studies on the NVQs as well as the South African NQF, and to a limited extent by the New Zealand study.

In the four countries which have adopted a strong outcomes-led or competency-based approach (including VET in Australia), serious critiques exist and have continued to be made of the systems. Young, in Chapter 1, points out a key critique made in the United Kingdom: that assessment is always about making inferences on the basis of performance. Even assessment in workplaces does not show how a given candidate will perform when the assessor is not present, or in a slightly different situation, or even, simply in a repeat of the same task. In an outcomes-based framework, assessors have to draw inferences about the underlying competence of the candidate, based on their performance. It is never a straightforward matter setting an assessment task, or judging a candidate on one. There may be situations in which assessment which concentrates on knowledge and understanding may provide better grounds for inferring competence than a specific number of observable performances, and implies that this is more likely to be the case the higher up the qualification ladder one proceeds. Young also argues that, in direct contradiction to the claims often made by advocates of qualifications frameworks, knowledge of the learning process which leads to an outcome may in many instances be essential in order to make a reliable judgement about an observed performance.

The English, New Zealand and South Africa NVQs attempted to take the model further than the Australian VET model - to general and higher (university-based) education in the first two counties, and to professional qualifications in the third case. In each of these countries, this did not work, and the studies provide interesting arguments about why this was the case. However, the NVQ experience showed problems even when this approach was confined to vocational education, and in the CBT system in Australia, reviews have argued that the training packages are too detailed and lengthy, and are not user friendly to educators. In South Africa, the model has not only been changed for general and higher education, but also for what is referred to as trades and occupational education.

The Scottish framework uses the notion of outcomes in a different way, more as a language with which to find common ground between sectors. Outcomes are not seen as a mechanism to sever the links between institutions and qualifications, but as a way of creating better understandings of the aims of educational programmes. A question this raises, though, is which was more important: the outcome written on paper, or the

processes, discussions, agreements, and understandings, which ended in the outcomes? What is the value of the written outcomes if they are separated from these processes, discussions, agreements and understandings? Would the outcomes mean the same thing to people outside of Scotland?

Pathways: Losses and gains

Qualifications frameworks are introduced with the aim of increasing parity of esteem between vocational and academic education, as well as improving pathways between education and training sectors, and between education and the labour market. Some issues are worth raising in this regard from the five cases.

The studies (particularly the chapters on Australia and Scotland) show that relationships and arrangements between institutions, as well as trust established over time, are crucial to ensure movement of students between educational institutions, whether within a single educational sector (for example from one higher-education institution to another) or from one sector to another (for example from VET to higher education). While qualifications frameworks may play some role in providing a common language and formalizing these relationships, they cannot replace relationships of trust.

There seems to be some acceptance that the CBT model or a strong outcomes-based model will not work in schooling and higher education. In New Zealand and South Africa, where it was attempted, Ministries/Departments of Education have reverted to syllabus/curriculum-type models. But, as Wheelahan points out in Chapter 4, if this approach is used in VET and not the rest of the system, that introduces a new division between schooling and VET and between VET and higher education, and as Young argues, in Chapter 1 in relation to NVQs, can accentuate the low esteem of vocational qualifications.

This reinforces the argument made in some of the studies that the various aims of qualifications frameworks are in tension with each other. Improving pathways between VET and higher education may be in conflict with improving pathways between education and training systems and the labour market. In Scotland, as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) became more accepted as a route to a degree, they started to lose their character as an exit qualification leading into employment. This is a tension that many countries have to face. Improving progression from VET to higher education is a major way of improving the esteem with which it is held in society, and the likelihood that learners will enroll for VET programmes in countries where it is not well regarded. This is a feature of all countries, even those with highly-respected systems of vocational education; however, it is likely to be particularly true in developing countries as in the case of South Africa.

Students, parents, and employers are always likely to value university qualifications, and therefore by extension qualifications which can potentially lead to university. And as discussed at length above, employers do not always seem to value the qualifications which emanate from industry-led qualifications processes.

Institutional contexts seem important. In South Africa, for example, a very small percentage of the population enrolls in vocational programmes. Colleges are seen as the option of last resort, and in many instances are not well regarded institutions. In Scotland, on the other hand, nearly a quarter of school leavers enter a full-time course at a college, and others study part time at a college. The 43 colleges are multi-purpose institutions providing vocational and general opportunities; they have a tradition of access and responsiveness to employers' and individuals' needs, and their courses vary in length and mode of delivery. Focusing government resources on building quality, vibrant institutions may be more important than creating qualifications frameworks. It is interesting to note in this light that some of the reforms which underpinned the development of the Scottish

framework ensured a very strong central role for the state in relation to vocational education. This can be contrasted with the model which was attempted in South Africa, and which Chapter 5 argues may be inappropriate, especially in a country with a weak education system.

What is an NQF?

Finally, it is worth reiterating a point about qualifications frameworks that the current studies demonstrate: there is no single 'thing' that is represented by the term 'national qualifications framework'. This is important for policy-makers and governments feeling under pressure to develop an NQF, or attempting to develop an NQF.

The term "NQF" can be used to refer to a register of all qualifications available in a certain country (sector), or of all qualifications which are officially recognized in that country (sector). This notion of an NQF can be seen in the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications. Although it is not how the South African NQF was designed, in practice this NQF also ended up as a register of qualifications. It means an NQF is likely to include a very large number of qualifications (11,856 in South Africa).

On the other hand, the term NQF can be used to refer to a set of qualification types, demonstrating the pathways between them. Thus, the Australian qualifications framework contains 15 types of qualifications which are differentiated by the sector that accredits them.

An NQF can be seen as a set of level descriptors to enable qualifications to be assigned to a level, and thereby rated against other qualifications. However, in practice, the allocation of qualifications to a level tends to be anchored on the main publicly-known qualifications in the country, or achieved through detailed credit rating processes which include analyses of content and volume of learning of specific qualifications.

An NQF can also be seen as a set of level descriptors to generate qualifications. The South African NQF was supposed to work in this way, although in practice the level descriptors were developed after the new qualifications were developed.

It is important to point out that not all qualifications frameworks are conceived of with levels and level descriptors. The Australian framework explicitly does not, and therefore is closer to what is seen as a traditional qualifications system (although this is likely to change).

Scotland and South Africa perhaps represent opposite poles of types of NQFs developed in very different types of society. The Scottish framework is the result of a long series of educational reforms which built frameworks in different sectors, as well as building relationships between key role players. The South African framework was designed as a policy to transform the whole education and training system, and it was hoped that after its introduction, new qualifications would be developed which would improve quality through clear statements of standards contained in the qualification outcomes, increase provision, provide a basis for quality assurance, improve access, provide a clear basis for the recognition of prior learning, and so on. The second chapter of the companion publication to this one (Allais et al. 2009), Employment Working Paper No. 44: *Researching NQFs: Some conceptual issues,* provides an approach to developing a typology of NQFs.

It is hoped that together, the two publications have made for interesting reading, and have added new knowledge and insights for people concerned with understanding, researching, developing, or implementing NQFs.

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