

## CHAPTER 6

### THE INTRINSIC AND INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS OF THE SANQF

*‘...there is now a doing away of certain gates...gateways and hurdles that need to be overcome have been passed, have now been taken away because there is a national qualifications strategy...in theory it is supposed to take away the problems...but it’s the institutions that aren’t making it work’<sup>1</sup>.*

*In Chapter 5, an integrated framework as a powerful symbol of the break from the past, and the extent to which such a symbol has become the guiding philosophy for all thinking about the new education and training system, emerged. However, it became evident that symbolism and a philosophy do not provide pragmatic approaches that will enable large-scale reform to take place. Chapter 6 investigates such pragmatic approaches, including the structure and the design of an integrated framework, that is the intrinsic logic of the framework, as well as other measures, both within and outside of the framework that will enable the structure of the framework to come to life. The latter refers to the institutional logic or the policy breadth that supports the structural changes to the system. The second research question asks: Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) be made meaningful through an integrated framework? This question deals with the scope and the architecture of the framework. Scope and architecture represent the intrinsic logic of a national qualifications framework. The ‘intrinsic logic’ of an integrated framework is discussed in 6.2. The third question, Can the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?, deals with the ‘institutional logic’<sup>2</sup> that has to be considered for any reform to have effect, particularly in relation to ‘policy breadth’<sup>3</sup>, that is ‘the extent to which the establishment of the framework is directly and explicitly linked with other measures to influence how the framework is used’. The institutional logic of the framework is dealt with in 6.3. This chapter concludes (6.4) with an analysis of the scope, architecture and the policy breadth of an integrated framework.*

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<sup>1</sup> Public Further Education and Training Institution, Gauteng, Cycle 1 interview, Annexure 1, p. 21

<sup>2</sup> Raffe, 2003, p. 242

<sup>3</sup> Raffe, in SAQA, 2005, p. 33

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the ‘intrinsic logic’ and the concomitant ‘institutional logic’ (Raffe, 2003) of an integrated framework perceived to be important for the achievement of systemic coherence of the emerging education and training system in South Africa. The scope and architecture of an integrated framework is the intrinsic logic of such a framework, with scope referring to what is included, for example types of qualifications, the levels at which these qualifications are pitched and sites of learning. A comprehensive scope would include all of these. Architecture refers to the structure of the framework and the design of qualifications that are included on the framework which, in a comprehensive system, attempts to describe similarities in order to enable articulation and progression within the system. The institutional logic of a framework reflects the ways in which measures, including policies and funding, both within and outside of the framework, enable the formation of relationships in keeping with the structure of such a framework. Together scope, architecture and policy breadth reflect the systemic coherence of the system. Table 6.1 draws the relationship between Research Questions 2 and 3 and the conceptual framework for the study.

**Table 6.1**

***The Relationship between Research Questions 2 and 3 and the Conceptual Framework***

<b>Main research question</b>	
To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?	
<b>Supporting question</b>	<b>Conceptual framework</b>
Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework?	Integration as the scope of the SANQF and the architecture of the framework and of qualifications
<b>Supporting question</b>	<b>Conceptual framework</b>
Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?	Integration as policy breadth

Chapter 6 will thus show the relationship between the scope of the framework, the structure or architecture of the framework and of qualifications, and the extent to

which the intrinsic logic of the framework influences and impacts on the institutional logic of the system.

The data drawn upon for these findings emerge from the following sources:

- Unstructured interviews
- Interviews conducted for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study
- Survey questionnaire data and supporting interviews for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study
- Focus group responses for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study
- Responses to ‘An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System’
- A qualitative analysis of a sample of qualifications

As in Chapter 5, the unstructured interviews produced valuable data. Full transcripts of the interviews are available in Annexure 7. The questions asked of institutions in Cycle 1 (education and training providers), included 1.3) (a) *Has the implementation of the NQF facilitated the portability of NQF registered qualifications between institutions?* and 1.3) (b) *How portable are NQF registered qualifications between streams (vocational/professional and academic)?* A prompt, to elucidate these two questions, was also used where necessary, namely *Do qualifications articulate with each other intra- and inter-institutionally?* ‘Employer’ interviews asked 1.2) *How portable are NQF registered qualifications between streams (vocational/professional and academic)?* with a prompt *Are academic qualifications accepted in the workplace?*, where the term ‘portability’ seemed unfamiliar. The survey questionnaire and supporting interviews for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study used statements, rather than questions, and respondents were asked to rate these statements on a six point scale (ranging from ‘Strongly disagree’ to ‘Too soon to say’). The relevant statements in the survey questionnaire in this regard are as follows:

*2.2.5) Recognition (credit transfer) is given for incomplete NQF qualifications when learners move from one institution to another*

*2.5.1) The NQF enables learners to move between academic qualifications and vocational qualifications*

*2.5.3) The NQF promotes/leads to greater cooperation between the formal education system and the world of work and training*

- 2.5.6) *South Africa has adopted a unified approach to education and training*
- 2.5.7) *The integration of education and training has improved career and learning pathing*
- 4.1.4) *NQF quality assurance ensure that qualifications are based on nationally agreed standards*
- 5.2.1) *The objectives of the NQF are aligned with the objectives of the National Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy*

The supporting interviews following on the completion of the survey questionnaire focused particularly on the extremes of the scale, for example, where a respondent indicated ‘Strongly disagree’, or ‘Strongly agree’ in terms of a statement. The reason was pragmatic – the survey questionnaire was long and very detailed (refer to Annexure 6) and, therefore, the interview focused on strong views of the respondent. Interview responses are captured in Annexure 1. In addition, a number of focus groups were conducted for both cycles of the NQF Impact Study. The focus groups that produced usable data include ‘Practitioners’ focus groups, where the questions 3.) *Are NQF qualifications portable across vocational, professional and academic streams?* and 5.) *Are NQF qualifications promoting greater cooperation between education and training agencies?*, were asked. In the ‘Learner’ focus group, questions asked attempted to take into consideration that learners will not necessarily have knowledge of technical terms in relation to the education and training system, and included questions such as 6.) *To what extent can you transfer credits from this institution/provider/learning site to other institutions/providers/learning sites without having to re-do large parts of the qualification?* The ‘Organised labour’ focus groups were dealt with along similar lines. As in Chapter 5, sector responses, including comments from all levels of the education and training system to ‘*An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System*’, produced a rich source of data. The final data source included a qualitative analysis of sample of qualifications that was undertaken for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study. This analysis focused particularly on the extent to which qualifications and their design not only facilitate progression and articulation within a sector, but also across sectors of education and training. This analysis is available in Annexure 3.

### *6.1.1 Emerging Themes*

The emerging themes evident from the data in relation to the ‘intrinsic logic’, that is the scope and architecture of an integrated framework, include meaningful articulation and progression routes in the form of clear learning and career pathways, which are perceived to be the consequence and benefit of integrated qualification frameworks. Further, the relationships between different sectors of the system and parity of esteem between such sectors emerge. The design of qualifications, and the common characteristics within qualifications, in keeping with the prescribed structure of qualifications included on the framework, is seen to facilitate portability of learning across sectors. The design of qualifications is also a feature of the ‘intrinsic logic’ of the new system.

In relation to the ‘institutional logic’, or the policy breadth of an education and training system, the themes emerging most strongly are the perceived lack of legislative coherence that is meant to support the implementation of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF); and the establishment of communities of practice and trust, which are reflected in the extent to which partnerships are formed, collaborative approaches to qualification design and quality assurance are developed, and joint planning is undertaken. The final theme deals with the emerging constraints to the development of meaningful links between the different sectors of the education and training system.

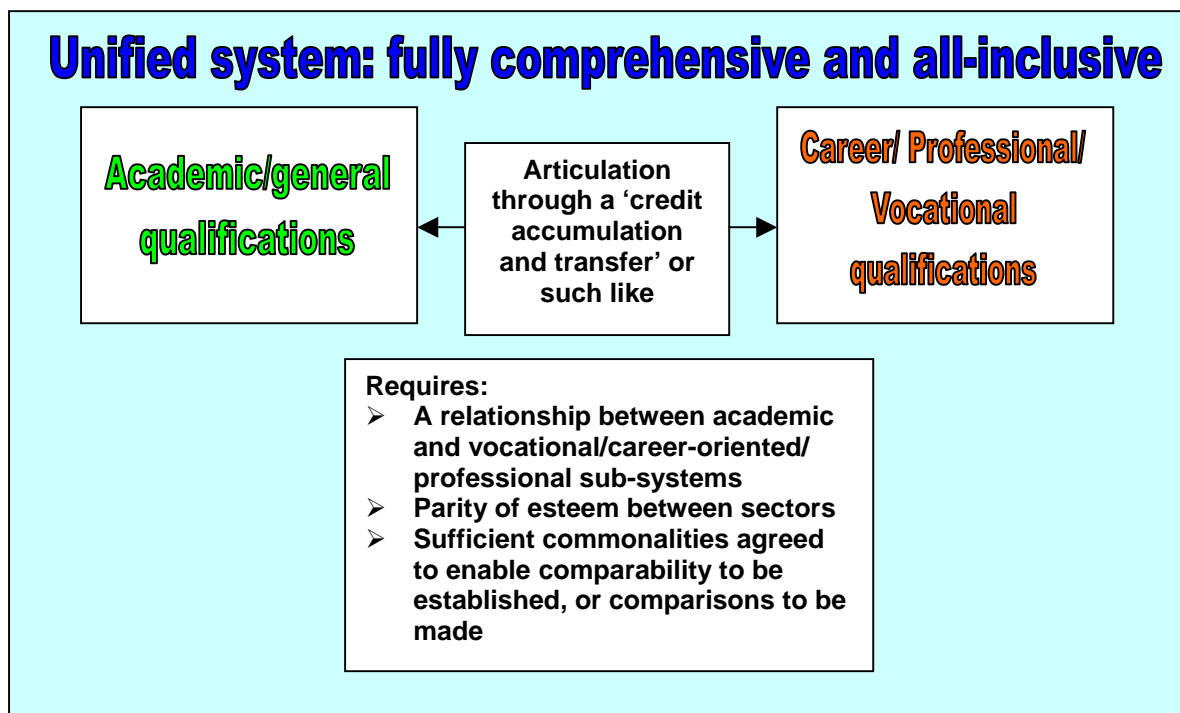
## **6.2 The Intrinsic Logic of an Integrated Framework**

It is evident, from the findings in Chapter 5, that the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) is underpinned by strong socio-political symbolism in relation to the ‘[subversion] of the hierarchies installed by the apartheid order’ (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 12) and that the symbolic ‘break from the past’ has profoundly influenced the guiding philosophy of the framework. However, there is the acknowledgement that, if the system is approached ‘from a purely ideological [point of view] and you don’t understand the context within which you are implementing, what you are heading for, is disaster’ (Chief Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 24). This seems to suggest that symbolism is not enough, and that structural arrangements to enhance integration should follow in order for the envisaged changes to occur. The intrinsic logic of an integrated framework deals with

design features of the system. In South Africa, these include features such as agreed levels at which qualifications are placed, common criteria for qualifications design and a standards setting system, as well as an agreed quality assurance system. ‘Intrinsic logic’ is described by Tuck, Hart and Keevy (2004, p.8) as ‘design features, such as flexible pathways and the establishment of equivalences between different qualifications’. Thus, the scope of a framework influences the *reach* of the framework across the system (SAQA, 2005, p. 32):

The *scope* of an NQF refers to the education and training sectors included in the framework. While some NQFs mainly function in vocational education and Training (VET), most NQFs seek to eventually increase the scope by developing relationships between all categories of education and training.

In the conceptual framework, scope is seen to be the extent to which the system is ‘unified and comprehensive’ (see Chapter 3). The findings in this chapter seem to be more in keeping with such international practice, where the systemic coherence of the system and pragmatic considerations influencing the way the system is constructed, are more prominent (see Literature Review). From such a point of view, integration seems to mean unified and comprehensive (Figure 6.1).



**Figure 6.1. Integration as the Scope of the Framework**

Hart (2005, p. 34) points out that a unified and comprehensive framework is most likely to achieve the aims of the NQF, but that such a framework would need more work in creating meaningful links:

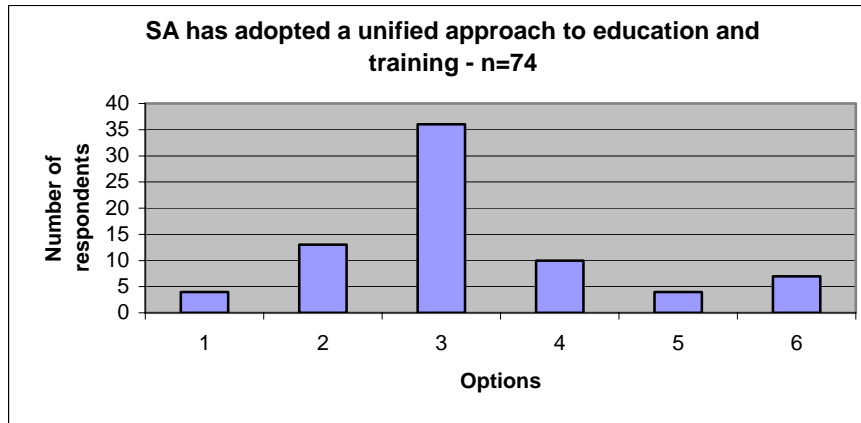
In some countries, including South Africa and Scotland, the NQF is (or aims to be) fully comprehensive, taking in academic, general, vocational and workplace learning at all levels from basic literacy and numeracy through to post-graduate degrees and top professional qualifications. In others the scope of the NQF is restricted in some way – usually to particular provider sectors. This may mean that the NQF only covers either university education or vocational education and training, or it can mean that there are co-existing, but separate, NQFs for these sectors as in England and New Zealand. The more restricted the scope of the framework the easier it should be to create credit links, but the wider the scope and the more diverse the contents of the framework, the greater the need there may be to establish a [Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)] system as a means of strengthening, and meeting the aims of, the NQF.

Apart from the socio-political imperatives of the SANQF as discussed in Chapter 5, the system seems to have been conceptualised in the acknowledgement that internationally ‘we are living in a world that needs to be joined up and so, by its very nature, if you think about things in a systemic manner, then you have to accept that ...you can’t draw neat boundaries [around elements of the system]’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 25). Integration then takes on the meaning that ‘the citizen has the whole system available to him’ (SAQA Board member, Annexure 1, p. 29), and that there are no ‘dead-ends’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 21):

The issue of no “dead-ends”, you know, that persons can pick up learning later in life...[that] because you had a bad start somewhere, it doesn’t mean that for the rest of your life you are going to be locked into a system that you can’t move.

This view seems to speak particularly to the structural possibilities of the SANQF (Blom, 2005), namely the possibilities of articulation and portability of credits attained for learning in different contexts and the recognition of such credits by different sub-sectors, that is the ability of learners to ‘transfer credits of qualifications or unit standards from one learning institution and/or employer to another’ (SAQA, 2001, p.9). One respondent spoke about a ‘credit matrix’, based on commonly agreed standards that will make the value and equivalence of learning across contexts more explicit (Public Higher Education Institution, Annexure 1, p. 33): ‘We need to have a credit matrix that is formalised and managed outside the institution’s autonomy’.

It is evident from the quantitative responses that there is support for a ‘unified’ approach. Figure 6.2 reflects the responses to the statement ‘South Africa has adopted a *unified approach* to education and training’. More than two thirds of the respondents agree, or strongly agree, that the education and training system is moving towards a unified approach.



**Figure 6.2. A Unified Approach**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

However, it is also evident that much of this support is still at a symbolic level: ‘[I]t is only rhetoric...if there hadn't been this resistance, this divide between education and labour, [then] more of the population would have seen the NQF in action’ (SAQA board member, Annexure 1, p. 22). Nevertheless, the intention with integration was to find a ‘common currency in learning’, by placing ‘all qualifications...on one framework and [finding] ways in which they work together’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 30). In principle, integration would then allow the kind of structural relationships between qualifications offered in sub-sectors of the system and the progression routes that are made possible through such relationships, to take place.

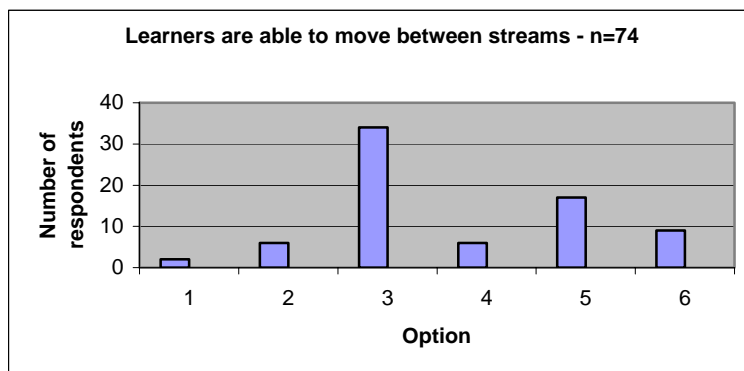
In some sectors, it seems as if the structure of the framework is indeed enhancing such structural relationships. One of the Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies, for example, indicated that the structure of the framework has facilitated the development of progression routes, including the professional registration of candidates, in their field of learning (Annexure 1, p. 31):



Our [Standards Generating Body (SGB)] has set up a framework of qualifications that flow one into the other, certificate to two year diploma...and then as a professional board we have adjusted our professional registration...to the NQF'

In this case, the intrinsic logic of the framework is 'making [integration] practical' (SAQA board member, Annexure 1, p. 28).

Again, the respondents to the survey questionnaire (Annexure 2) supported this view of the framework. More than half of the respondents agreed, or strongly agreed that learners are able to move between vocational, professional and academic streams (see Figure 6.3). However, as in the ETQA example above, this may be possible only within a particular family of qualifications, or within a broad field of learning. This may account for the number of respondents who disagree, and strongly disagree, (11% of the respondents) or who did not know, or who felt that it is too soon to say, whether such mobility is possible (35%) (Figure 6.3).



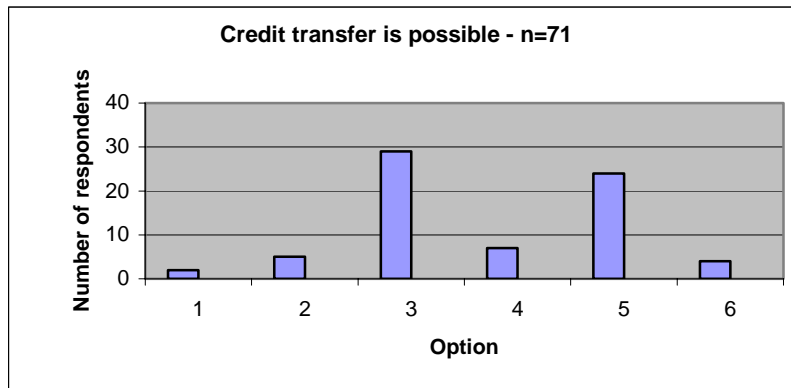
**Figure 6.3. Learners are able to move between Vocational, Professional and Academic Streams of the Education and Training system**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

Likewise, in terms of credit transfer between institutions and contexts, the respondents strongly supported the principle of credit transfer (Figure 6.4) and agree with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) that (Annexure 4, p. 20)

[it] should be possible for learners to gain qualifications (and even degrees) by completing parts (accumulated in the form of credit) over different lengths of time and combining them in different ways rather than

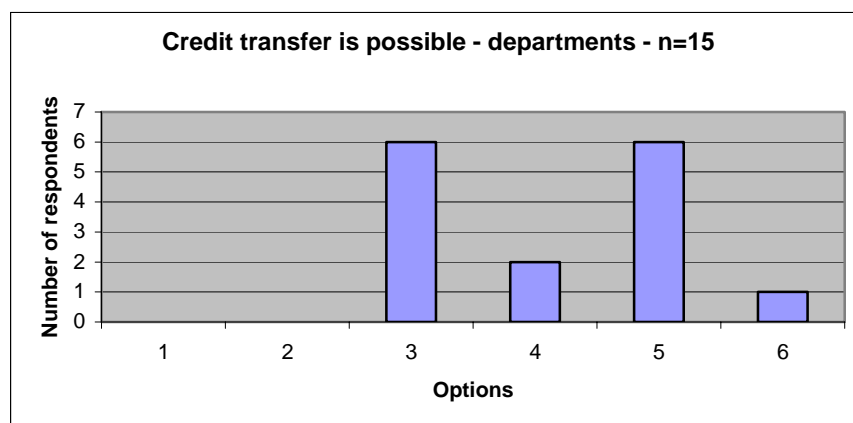
necessarily being tied to specific sequential programmes over a particular time.



**Figure 6.4. Recognition (Credit Transfer) is given for Incomplete Qualifications when Learners move from one Institution to another**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

However, while more than half of the respondents agreed, or strongly agreed that credit transfer is possible, more than a third of the remaining respondents indicated that they did not know whether this is the case (Figure 6.5). Ensor, (2003, p. 328) notes that, in South Africa, the NQF promised to be 'a radical credit accumulation and transfer system, [and] promised to accredit workers for accumulated proficiency', but this seems to be only an indication that the principle is supported and that in a substantial number of cases, this is not yet practice. The 'common currency' mentioned by the Executive Officer of SAQA (Annexure 1, p. 30) does not yet seem to be established. This has implications for the relationships between different sectors of the education and training system and the parity of esteem of such sectors. An analysis of some of the categories of respondents (for example, the departmental responses to the survey questionnaire – see Figure 6.5) in relation to credit transfer, confirms this view.



**Figure 6.5. Departmental Response - Recognition (Credit Transfer) is given for Incomplete Qualifications when Learners move from one Institution to another**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

While the departmental respondents did not disagree, an equal number of respondents 'agreed' and indicated that they 'did not know'. An important reason for this seems to be the lack of parity of esteem between institutions offering education and training. In addition, the structural arrangements that would enable articulation and credit transfer, are not seen to be available yet, except within particular sub-sectors of the system.

### 6.2.1 Parity of Esteem

In response to the statement: 'qualifications facilitate mobility between vocational, professional and academic streams and between institutions', a number of interviewees strongly disagreed, in contrast with the quantitative data (Figure 6.3).

This is borne out by comments emerging from the supporting interviews, for example: (Public Higher Education Institution, Annexure 1, p. 33):

Strongly disagree. If you talk with the guys from the university, they have little knowledge about their qualifications, and they will not accept the technikon qualification, so I don't think there is enough mobility in the system yet. I hope it's [not] going to take a long time. Implementing it is a problem.

Many interviewees place the blame on institutions that 'do not apply the principle' (Public Higher Education Institution, Annexure 1, p. 37). Again, it seems that the ability to move between different sectors is still at a conceptual level: '...[L]et's say

from governments side that's the plan, but I'm not sure that institutions really implement this at the moment or know how to implement this at the moment' (Private Further Education and Training Institution, Annexure 1, p. 21).

The feeling seems to be that despite the fact that all qualifications have been registered on the framework, that is that the scope of the framework covers all sectors and levels of education and training, there is confusion about the status of qualifications (SAQA Board Member, Annexure 1, p. 15) and that 'it is still a problem of public versus private sector....[T]he public sector is reluctant to allow us into the system even though those programs are registered and accredited, there is still a problem' (Private, HET, Annexure 1, p. 32). Further, there seems to be lack of parity even between public institutions, for example (Public HET institution, Annexure 1, p. 33): 'We are stuck because institutions have not demonstrated willingness to recognize this. The issue of equivalence of institutions and the power play between the institutions is a disadvantage to learners'.

It therefore seems that the lack of parity is inhibiting the extent to which credits can be transferred between institutions. While the principle is well accepted, practice does not yet seem to produce evidence of improved portability. However, it is evident that the lack of portability is not only due to the unequal status of institutions, but that it is also a result of practices that still reflect the previous system (Public HET, Annexure 1, p. 31):

We do try but the system does not allow portability, they only allow traditional portability. If people enquire about qualifications from other institutions I firstly ensure that they are on the web [the SAQA web-based database] and try and find equivalence with what we are doing and what they are doing. We have extra-curricular courses [to assist students to access our courses] and we would like that to be [the] curriculum. When the new [CHE/HEQC] policy [came] out, [we] sent [our courses] in for accreditation as certificates...and it came back, not accredited. They told us to keep it as an extra-curricular course. But there is no safety in that for the students. That will not be a portable qualification, and we must manoeuvre our way into other institutions, that is unacceptable.

A recent report, entitled *Credit Accumulation and Transfer in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework* (SAQA, 2006, p. 49), confirms the

‘continuing limitations of portability of qualifications between universities’, for example:

- The 50% residency clause [a regulation from the previous system dealing with credit transfer between public higher education institutions] that inhibited transfer of credits between institutions for more than 50% of credits already attained at the first institution.
- Modular versus semester systems
- Differences in syllabus content or length of study

The limitations above start to hint at the many possible reason for the difficulties in building articulation routes, one of which seems to be located within the design of qualifications.

### 6.2.2 *The Design of Qualifications*

In keeping with the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework, the design features of qualifications are meant to enhance articulation between different learning contexts in that they are intended to have sufficient commonalities across qualifications that will make it possible for students to move horizontally, vertically and diagonally amongst different learning contexts of the system. To enable such mobility, the architecture of the qualifications should describe and define common aspects that will aid articulation across different learning contexts. This is expressed in the degree of prescriptiveness and ‘the stringency of the criteria which qualifications have to satisfy in order to be included’ on the framework (Raffe, 2003, in Tuck et al., 2004, p. 5). In South Africa, two broad types of qualifications are registered on the framework: unit-standard based qualifications and non-unit standard based qualifications<sup>4</sup>. The former are usually associated with sector occupationally directed qualifications, while the latter include qualifications offered at (mostly) public institutions, including vocational further education and training and higher education institutions. These two types of qualification have been the subject of much debate but, according to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 21),

...the debate over unit standards-based qualifications and whole [non-unit standard based] qualifications should now be laid to rest. Attention should

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<sup>4</sup> Unit standards-based qualifications are made up of a specific grouping of unit standards according to specific rules of combination. Each unit standard specifies outcomes and assessment criteria, while non-unit standards-based (or whole) qualifications specify only exit level outcomes and are not made up of distinct unit standards, but rather of subjects or modules.

focus on the complex process of establishing a functional credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) scheme, without which the NQF objective of facilitating “access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths” will be indefinitely delayed.

In an analysis of a sample of qualifications currently registered on the framework, it became evident that, while some sets of qualifications simply ‘made some token effort at addressing portability and transferability (often by including or paraphrasing the relevant sections from the SAQA Act) or misinterpreted the meaning...’ (Annexure 3, p. 1), other qualifications have been deliberately designed to enhance portability and articulation:

Qualifications that have seriously attempted to provide details of portability by specifying precise articulation possibilities and career path options [include] National Certificate: Supervision of Water Reticulation Operations, Waste Water Operations; General Education and Training Certificate: Conservation; National Certificate: Hygiene and Cleaning; and the National Certificate: Motor Sales and Support Services.

However, as noted earlier, it is evident that portability and articulation often seem to be within a particular ‘family’ of qualifications, with progression routes possible across ‘similar trades’ (Annexure 3, p. 1):

The [National Certificate: Supervision of Water Reticulation Operations] allows for both vertical and horizontal portability. Vertical portability is illustrated with the introduction of National Certificate in Water Reticulation on NQF level 4; the learner may pass from a National Certificate in Water Reticulation on NQF level 2 and progress to supervising water reticulation projects operating under a foreman or engineer. The qualification also allows access to a foreman level qualification on NQF level 5. It allows for mobility across similar trades – learners may study towards management certificates or diplomas in the sector or other sector on NQF level 5 or 6. The qualification provides clear guidelines of learner portability.

In addition, these qualifications and the progression routes described by them, for example, are all ‘unit-standard based’ qualifications and it is doubtful that such qualifications could articulate directly with ‘non-unit standard based qualifications’. The systemic arrangements to achieve such routes are seen to be neglected by the authorities responsible for systemic coherence. One interviewee noted, for example, that (Annexure 1, p. 34)

...there are problems. We are talking about fundamental aspects of qualifications. Fundamentals [i.e. language and communication,

mathematics and mathematical literacy and computer literacy] are supposed to be the most portable. Fundamentals and outcomes-based education were the mechanisms for the integration, portability, transferability and progression of staff. SAQA, DoE and DoL are not engaging sufficiently on what to do about this.

In this regard, the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 21) points out that

[i]t is true that all learning is not portable, that unit standards and qualifications are not automatically transferable...and that moving between one learning context and another requires the adaptation of skills and the integration of new knowledge. It is also the case that qualifications designers and learning institutions will be challenged to avoid monolithic courses that create barriers to portability.

Ironically, in the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) a ‘separationist’ approach is what is seen to be proposed for the new shape of the SANQF: ‘The proposed structure would create another three silos. The objective of achieving portability is being undermined by the silo mentality (SACP, Annexure 4, p. 20). The Financial and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (FASSET) (Annexure 4, p. 21) agrees and maintains ‘This [the three tracks] does not represent the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) principles of mobility and articulation’. The Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority (INSETA) (Annexure 4, p. 21) suggests that the three proposed pathways, therefore, ‘reinforce the problems with articulation that there were in the past’.

Thus, it seems to be important that ‘we have to build the bridges in a very explicit way to achieve integration’ (SAQA Board member, Annexure 1, p. 28) because ‘reducing unnecessary differences between whole qualifications and those based on unit standards will also aid articulation and thus benefit learners’ (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 20). The CHE/HEQC (Annexure 4, p. 21) agrees and notes that ‘it depends on design issues and how far the unit-standard model is retained for the different types of qualification’.

One of the ways in which to build such bridges, according to the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) (now part of Higher Education South Africa), is to build in ‘foundation programmes’ (Annexure 4, p. 21):

The establishment of foundation programmes would enable learners to pick up the theoretical, discipline knowledge for entry into [Higher

Education] learning. In this way public institutions create entry to learning pathways that lead to progression and qualifications.

However, it is evident that this will have to be a deliberate attempt and that the intrinsic logic of the integrated framework will have to be taken to a level of detail that is not yet possible through the statement that the principle of articulation enables ‘learners, on successful completion of accredited prerequisites, to move between components of the delivery system’ (SAQA, 2001, p. 10).

Where such deliberate work has been undertaken within the engineering sector, it seems that it is possible to achieve meaningful articulation between different types and sites of learning, for example (Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), Annexure 4, p. 21),

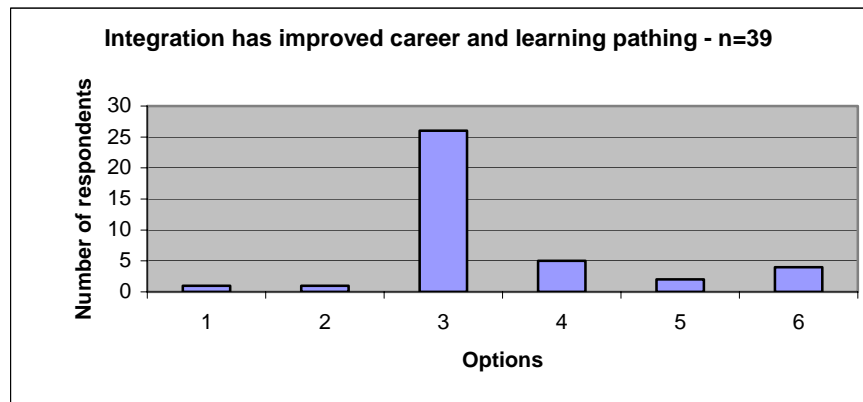
...a preliminary study shows that it may be possible to produce a unit-standards based EXIT LEVEL standard for a qualification that is substantially, but not exactly, equivalent to the whole qualification version. We advocate an approach to promoting articulation and progression in the professions in which clear standards (either exit level or unit standard) are defined at a limited number of stages. For example, we are working toward whole qualifications and substantially equivalent unit standards at Stage 1, namely the exit levels of the National Diploma and BTech in Engineering disciplines and the BEng. Similarly, we are in the process of developing unit standards at the level of competence required for registration in the categories of Engineer, Engineering Technologist and Engineering Technician. We would also wish to be able to reference suitable unit standards in Mathematics, Physical Science and Languages at Level 4 that would give the benchmark of preparedness for higher education studies in engineering. *With these three sets of standards, providers would be in a better position to develop pathways for progression of learners* (emphasis added).

This is confirmed by other sectors in that ‘qualification matrices’ for their sectors are planned to aid articulation and progression, for example (Public Higher Education Institution, Annexure 1, p. 29): ‘[T]his is what the qualifications matrix is beginning to address...because in our context we have an exciting market niche...’.

The quantitative data confirm that learning and career paths are seen to be improved where deliberate work is undertaken to clarify articulation and progression routes. However, it should be noted that the survey questionnaire did not seek to investigate the extent to which articulation across different contexts takes place, only the general



principle, and in this regard, more than two thirds of the respondents (67%) agreed that learning and career paths have improved as a result of the integrated approach to education and training (Figure 6.6).



**Fig. 6.6. Integration has Improved Career and Learning Pathing**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

For that reason, FASSET and other commentators are opposed to the concept that education and training tracks should be separated into three (Annexure 4, p. 21): 'In the interests of the learner, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to navigate his way through a learning pathway vertically and horizontally across the three grids'. FASSET further acknowledges that, while there is a 'difference between education, with a subject philosophy, and training, that is driven by a job delivery philosophy', it considers it important that in the professions, clear articulation pathways should be established, as 'professional qualifications will straddle across two/three grids'. In their view, the *Consultative Document* proposals (DoE & DoL, 2003) do not appear to have satisfactorily addressed articulation and transferability issues.

A private further and higher education institution agrees and notes that 'the ability to progress within a different path is important for the development of the individual and to promote the concept of life long learning' (Annexure 4, p. 22).

It is evident that, while most respondents to the survey questionnaire, people interviewed and commentators agree that 'flexible pathways and the establishment of equivalences between different qualifications' (Tuck, *et al*, 2004, p.8) could be an

important benefit of an integrated framework, they have not yet occurred in a systemic way, except in particular sub-sectors. Thus, while the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework suggests that seamless progression between different contexts will be enabled, the evidence shows that this is taking place only to a limited extent. More than the design of qualifications seems to be needed for this principle to become a practical solution to the lack of articulation and progression routes through the system.

### 6.2.3 *Conclusions – The Intrinsic Logic of an Integrated Framework*

A comprehensive and unified framework, representing the scope of an integrated framework, can undoubtedly enhance articulation, progression and mobility of learners across different contexts of the education and training system. In making the whole system available to learners from different learning contexts, and in finding ways in which qualifications from within such contexts relate to one another, in theory, it is possible to enable seamless progression. However, it is evident that while there is much support for these principles, from both the quantitative, as well as qualitative data, such articulation and progression routes seem to be limited to ‘sub-frameworks’, or ‘frameworks within frameworks’. The ability to transfer credits from the opposite ends of education and training still seems to be constrained. In part, the perceived lack of parity between institutions seems to be to blame. It is clear that public institutions amongst themselves are not viewed as equally good, nor are private institutions seen to be on par with public institutions. Also, the status of qualifications offered in different contexts, for example in public discipline-based institutions and in private, occupationally based institutions, is not seen to be equal, despite the fact that such qualifications are all placed, at the same level, on an integrated framework. Further, the different types of qualifications, namely unit-standard based and non-unit standard based qualifications, seem to add to the difficulty to determine equivalence or, at least, comparability between such qualifications. In addition, the fact that old structures are still in place, such as regulations dealing with credit transfer between public higher education institutions (the 50% residency clause) that were a feature of the pre-NQF system, further inhibits credit transfer, even if there had been willingness to facilitate transfer. Likewise, the ‘level of prescription’ in relation to qualifications design has not yet, to any great degree, facilitated articulation, except where deliberate attempts were made to conceptualise the progression routes holistically and

within a particular sub-framework. The architecture of qualifications, as a particular perspective on integration, is thus not enabling mobility of learners much outside of the specific sector within they find themselves. This seems to suggest that unless the intrinsic logic, and the design features of an integrated framework, including common levels, qualifications design and standards setting structures, are supported by other measures, integration will not be achieved. The CHE/HEQC (Annexure 4, p. 23) captures this as follows:

The creation of a qualifications framework cannot on its own bring about fundamental change in education and training provision and practices. Ultimately, it is the concerted effort and deliberate building of the capabilities and capacities of providers through the support of government and other agencies and through institutional initiatives in the areas of curriculum, learning, teaching and personnel expertise that are the crucial levers of fundamental transformation.

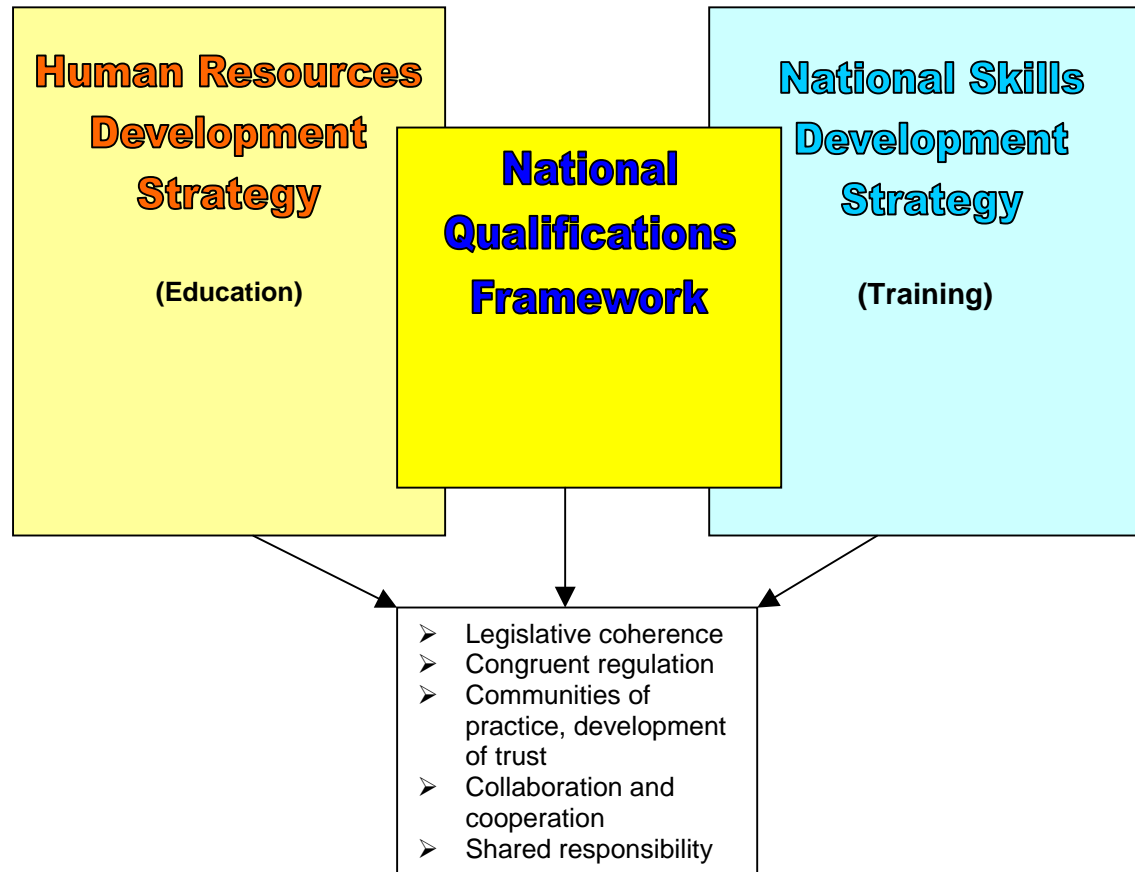
### 6.3 Institutional Logic

The discussion of the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework in the previous section suggests that the design of a framework is not sufficient to ensure the kind of change envisaged for the education and training system. The CHE/HEQC, (Annexure 4, p. 23) notes that ‘the NQF is a *major* vehicle for the transformation of education and training. However, the NQF is not the sole mechanism for transforming education and training and for realising various social purposes and goals’. The SACP agrees and says that ‘so many factors influence the human resource development that is taking place. The NQF is not the only factor. Specific programmes and projects bring about real progress. More emphasis is needed on implementation’ (Annexure 4, p. 23). Raffe, (2003, p. 243) therefore maintains that ‘a qualifications framework may be ineffective if it is not complemented by measures to reform the surrounding institutional logic’. Institutional logic, according to him, deals with

...the opportunities, incentives and constraints arising from such factors as the policies of educational institutions (in their roles as providers and selectors), funding and regulatory requirements, timetabling and resource constraints, the relative status of different fields of study and the influence of the labour market and the social structure.

However, in South Africa, institutional logic includes more than the arrangements at the level of the provider as ‘complementary measures’ to reform the system. The SANQF is, quite explicitly, seen as one of the elements in an overall national strategy

to enhance human resources and to support skills development. In the conceptual framework for this study (Chapter 3), the interdependence between the different elements of education and training, human resource development and skills development, are presented in Figure 6.7.



**Figure 6.7: Integration as Policy Breadth**

The departments, for example, in talking about ‘education’ on the one hand, representing the Human Resource Development (HRD) strategy and ‘training’, representing the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS), on the other, maintain that (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 7)

[t]hey are in fact not opposites but equally essential facets of the same national learning system. The National Qualifications Framework is a vital mechanism for holding the tension between them and bringing out the complementarity and mutually reinforcing attributes of institutional and workplace learning.

Thus, in theory, the legislation, policy and regulation that govern the relationship between these different aspects of the human resource and skills development strategies for the country should be coherent and congruent, while policies should stretch across possible divides, that is they suggest the need for ‘policy breadth’. However, many respondents and commentators seem to feel that this is not the case, partly because the political heads of the system are not seen to be taking on their responsibility to ensure coherence and congruence.

### *6.3.1 Political Leadership and Policy Alignment to achieve ‘Policy Breadth’*

Political leadership, seen to be necessary to enhance the ‘complementarity’ of the three legs of the strategy, is perceived to be lacking. A private further and higher education institution, in their response to the proposals contained in the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003), notes that ‘this integrated approach by the Department of Education and Department of Labour has many merits. Joint responsibility for this function is admirable, [but] is it realistic and “doable”?’ (Annexure 4, p. 23). The CHE/HEQC, in *their* response maintain that ‘despite many references to the importance of collaboration [between the departments] this “divided ownership” [of the SANQF] creates a number of problems’ (Annexure 4, p. 23). The result seems to be a sense of policy misalignment: ‘[W]e found the lack of alignment of national policy regarding education and training an obstacle’ (CTP, Annexure 4, p. 23). Further, the proposed changes to the SANQF mooted in the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) do not seem to take current legislation, in the skills development leg of the system, into account: ‘[I]t is not clear how the following structural changes will impact on the skills development legislation’ (FASSET, Annexure 4, p. 23). SAQA, in its response to another set of proposals emanating from the national Department of Education, captures the sense of ‘policy uncertainty’ as follows:

Within the context of the commitment to the objectives of the NQF and the legislative framework provided by the SAQA Act of 1995, SAQA finds itself precariously positioned – on the one hand SAQA is obliged to comment on the draft HEQF policy, and while most willing to do so to ensure improved NQF development and implementation, it is on the other hand severely compromised in that the draft HEQF policy appears to ignore much of the current legislative framework, most notably the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) and the Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998). This is most evident in the re-assignment of roles and responsibilities of SAQA and existing Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) other than the

Council on Higher Education and its Higher Education Quality Committee. The draft HEQF policy presupposes extensive amendments to the current legislation as mooted in the *Consultative Document* (DoE and DoL, 2003), even though the outcome of that process is still undetermined (2004, p. 8).

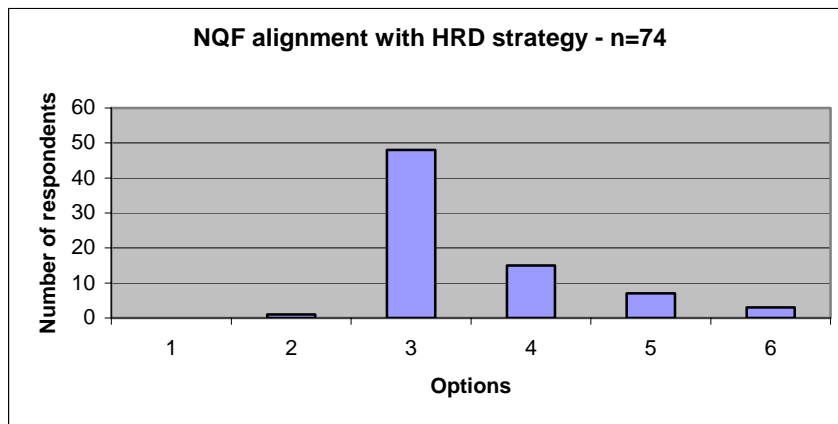
The CHE/HEQC agrees that the lack of alignment of key policies that are meant to govern the human resource strategy in South Africa ‘requires policy continuity’, but that the higher education sector has to constantly ‘cope with policy unpredictability’, which is leading to ‘considerable stress, strain and anxiety within national quality assurance agencies and providers’ (Annexure 4, p. 24).

Further, SADTU notes that the ‘legislations with different mandates undermines integration’, (Annexure 4, p. 24) and thus inhibit coordination across jurisdictions. SAUVCA agrees and maintains that ‘policy alignment is a necessary condition for successful implementation within each sector or system’ (Annexure 4, p. 24):

This policy is necessary for the effective implementation of the NQF in terms of the development of a qualifications map, qualification design features, standards setting, quality assurance, and indeed, the design and implementation of flexible access routes.

Thus, implementing bodies are finding it difficult to conceptualise what needs to be done to achieve an integrated framework because, at a political level, there seems to be limited congruence between the departments’ legislation and regulation. The policy breadth, which intended to enhance integration across different sectors of the education and training system, is not seen to be achieved.

Nevertheless, the quantitative responses to the survey questionnaire statement, ‘the objectives of the NQF are aligned with the objectives of the National *Human Resource Development* (HRD) strategy’, are almost overwhelmingly positive (Figure 6.8).



**Fig. 6.8. The Objectives of the NQF are Aligned with the Objectives of the HRD Strategy**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

Again, this seems to be more of an expression of the hopes and aspirations for the system, rather than actual practice. The political impasse is seen to inhibit the coordination, cooperation and partnerships between the different sectors of the system: 'It became clear that there were serious disagreements between the two custodians of the NQF, the Department of Labour and the Department of Education' (SACP, Annexure 4, p. 24), not least in the incongruence of legislation and regulation, to the extent that this may 'require amending the legislation' (National Skills Authority (NSA), Annexure 4, p. 24) to better reflect the mandate of different bodies in the system. The CHE/HEQC (Annexure 4, p. 24) suggests that the lack of clarity 'increases the possibility of bureaucratic "turf-wars" and jurisdictional ambiguities that will undermine the implementation of the objectives of the NQF and the HRD strategies' and that 'this further undermines the collaboration required between workplace-based and institution-based models of learning' (COSATU, Annexure 4, p. 25). Importantly, it seems to undermine the formation of communities of practice within which the necessary work can be undertaken.

### 6.3.2 *Communities of Practice*

The notion of 'communities of practice' has become influential within debates in education over the last fifteen years (Parker, 2006), and is defined as '...a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other

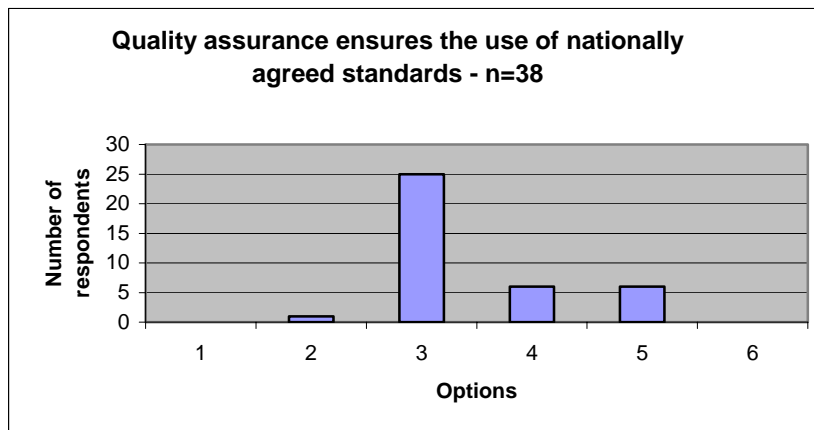
tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). In the South African context communities of practice have also been interpreted as 'communities of trust' where 'it is highly desirable to create communities of trust both within learning sectors and across the two worlds of workplace learning and institutional learning' (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 27). However, as French (2005, p. 55) points out, 'the NQF was created in a context in which there was no trust between the proponents of the new order and the providers of the old order'. He maintains that

[t]he main reason for the decision for an integrated framework was the belief that the segregated institutions and processes of education provision in South Africa were for the most part centres of privilege or exclusion, were backward and corrupt, and were scarcely worthy of notice.

The new system thus has to enable the development of *new* communities of practice or trust. The involvement of 'stakeholders' at every level, and in every aspect of the education and training system, seems to have been an intrinsic logic applied to the development of such communities: in a common standards setting process; common qualifications design and in quality assurance. The SACCP argues that 'the NQF and its structures were founded on stakeholder participation and involvement – in standards and qualifications development and registration, in workplace implementation, in [Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)] and in monitoring and evaluation' (Annexure 4, p. 25). The logic seems to be that stakeholders, in representing the intended beneficiaries of the system, would become the new communities of practice, and the mechanism to develop such communities is an agreed quality assured framework that uses commonly agreed standards.

The quantitative data, in response to the survey questionnaire statement, 'NQF quality assurance practices ensure that qualifications are based on nationally agreed standards', shows a high degree of agreement in this regard (Figure 6.9).





**Fig. 6.9. Quality Assurance and Nationally Agreed Standards**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

Over two thirds of the respondents felt that quality assurance measures enhance the use of agreed standards. Theoretically, in terms of the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework, quality assurance will ensure that learning is considered equivalent, regardless of where such learning is acquired, if commonly agreed standards are used for qualifications. The interviewees largely agree. A SAQA board member, for example, indicates that the design of qualifications and the level descriptors were meant to enhance parity of esteem, and that 'it's only when these things talk to one another and when they are compared and quality assured and delivered with that in mind that you have integration' (Annexure 1, p. 30). A public higher education institution captures the perceived advantages of a common standards setting system as follows (Annexure 1, p. 34):

[The] principles of [outcomes-based education are that] if you have unit standards in management, [they] should apply wherever management is needed, [for example] you need a generic introduction to management, in terms of production management, environmental management, etc.

It is, therefore, evident that common standards are seen to assist with mobility: '...[I]n terms of outcomes, both specific outcomes, or exit level outcomes or qualifications, I think there is portability and mobility where students can move fairly freely between institutions' (Public higher education institution, Annexure 1, p. 35). An Education and Training Quality Assurance body also agrees and notes that the 'NQF is based on the same unit standards. So, there is no reason why I could say [my qualification] is

more portable than yours if [they are] based on the same unit standards’ (Annexure 1, p. 35). Such standards are being developed by ‘stakeholders’, representing constituencies who will benefit from standards and qualifications. In a sense, the standards generation bodies are new communities of practice, and the stakeholder principle seems to be strongly supported: ‘...[T]he importance of stakeholder participation in the conceptual stage of standard generation cannot be over-emphasised...[and]...we recommend that all stakeholders be accorded the same status and role, in order to avoid the dominance of one stakeholder at the expense of others’ (COSATU, Annexure 4, p. 25). Also, it is by no means only organised labour organisations that support a stakeholder approach. The CTP says ‘...we support the importance of interdependent stakeholders participating in the process of generating standards’ (Annexure 4, p. 26). Likewise, institutions support commonly agreed standards, for example (Private further and higher education institution, Annexure 4, p. 26): ‘Much awareness has been built around the generation and development of commonly agreed upon, internationally benchmarked standards’. However, the higher education community notes that ‘national prescription, standardisation and regulation should happen only at the most generic levels’ (Annexure 4, p. 26) as a possible mechanism to overcome the difficulties in achieving articulation between the two main types of qualifications, namely unit-standards based and non-unit standards based qualifications (refer to earlier discussion).

Nevertheless, ‘the establishment of workable articulation mechanisms is crucial’ and ‘will depend on partnerships and “communities of trust” being built and strengthened between providers from different sites, contexts and learning domains’ (SAUVCA, Annexure 4, p. 26). Such communities of trust hinge, to a large extent, on quality assurance processes in the different sectors of education and training. An Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA), for example, noted that even if providers do not interact directly, the quality assurance process in that sector is engendering trust (Annexure 1, p. 36):

They still don’t speak to one another, they still don’t exchange information, they still don’t assist one another, but the learner just slots into the system...because we [the ETQA] capture the individual’s formative assessment...they [have assessed] that she is competent, the moderator is present, and the institution is accredited...they don’t even query it with us.

Another ETQA agrees and indicates that agreed standards and quality assurance enhance portability (Annexure 1, p. 43): ‘If we have not had insight into the qualification, into the quality assurance, we will not certify, certificate or acknowledge, because we don’t know what is going on’. A private higher education institution considers quality assurance as the assurance of a minimum standard, which, in their view means that other providers are trustworthy (Annexure 1, p. 43): ‘The role of quality assurance is to see that the programmes developed meet the minimum requirements for accreditation and they are registered with SAQA and they meet the NQF requirements’. Agreed quality criteria used across education and training systems are therefore also seen to enhance the development of communities of practice: ‘...[A]ccreditation is based on criteria ensuring that all systems and processes are in place to ensure quality of training and assessment throughout the process’ and therefore ‘quality assurance is seen as a benchmark whereby trust in other institutions’ systems and processes could be developed’ (SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 42). A public Higher Education Institution (Annexure 1, p. 42) supports this view and maintains that

...it is a much needed system to have [a] registered qualification that is quality assured. It is a useful reference and for the security of the student as well. It is useful for providers to ensure that it is at the correct level and that the qualification [is] part of the SA system.

Agreed quality criteria are thus seen to be important, as ‘different sets of quality standards or criteria...[create] inconsistencies in quality’ (FASSET, Annexure 4, p. 22). However, despite agreed quality criteria, these are still not considered sufficient because ‘other bodies, which adopt a different approach to quality assurance, are perceived to be less rigorous’ (INSETA, Annexure 4, p. 26). A SAQA board member voiced the frustration that seems to become more evident throughout the system: ‘...[I]f we could find quality assurance processes where there is trust...for me the crucial thing is about mutual trust, about one another’s quality assurance processes...’(Annexure 1, p. 43).

Agreed standards and agreed quality criteria, therefore, still seem to be in the realm of the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework. Standards and quality assurance measures are applied differently in differing contexts, particularly in relation to the

two types of qualification discussed earlier, and in the quality assurance measures utilised by the different quality assurance bodies.

The NSA (Annexure 4, p. 27) says that there should be other incentives for building communities of practice, such as ‘a direct exchange of information between SETAs and relevant faculty-based clusters of training institutions’. Such partnerships ‘could inform new funding arrangements’ in order to ‘develop networks of employers for workplace experience, internships, etc.’. This hints at the notion of ‘policy breadth’: not only should legislation and regulation be congruent but at a practical level, funding mechanisms could encourage the development of partnerships and collaboration within and across institutions and workplaces and vice versa.

However, such collaboration and coordination does not seem to be enabled through quality assurance alone: ‘Issues of [quality assurance] have really not [resulted], in my view, a joint coordinated approach that is linked to the development of the system. The system is more fragmented than integrated’ (National Department of Education, Annexure 1, p. 41). This seems to be the case despite the application of the ‘same rules’ (ETQA, Annexure 1, p. 41):

If they don’t open the door for us to talk to them...there is no way of building a relationship ...and we would think that the same rules, hopefully, apply to everybody, so, if they have gone through an audit for SAQA and everything is in place, their process ought to be trustworthy and if we have built a relationship, and we have tested that on occasion, then there should be no reason not to trust what they do.

Further, collaboration is seen to be complicated because of competition between providers and of being ‘on each other’s turf’ (Public Further Education and Training Institution, Annexure 1, p. 32). Other public institutions agree (Public Higher Education Institution, Annexure 1, p. 32): ‘I think there is still some tension between public providers and private providers because private providers are taking away our business. They are taking our students...[I]f they are in the vicinity, we regard them as competition’. Some institutions feel that it is because of financial gain that there is no trust (Public Further Education and Training Institution, Annexure 1, p. 39): ‘Let’s put it this way, they don’t trust each other. There might be some more sinister [reasons] – it’s about money’, while others feel that the challenge is to create formal linkages ‘between providers and the SETAs as there is a lot of competition in the

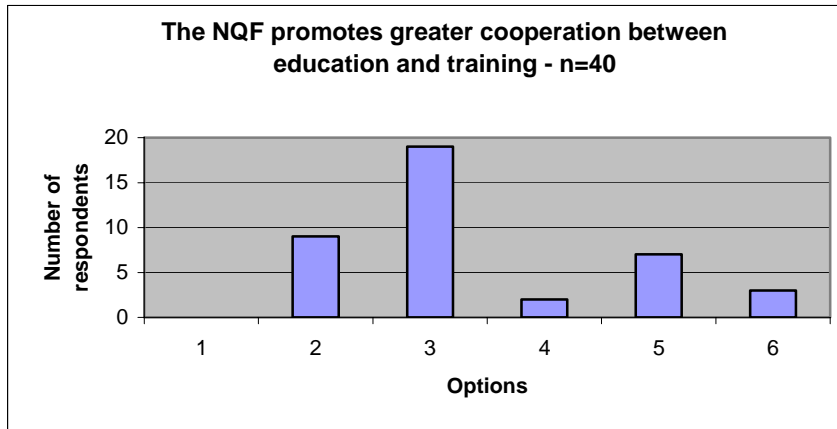
marketplace. It is important that all providers are considered by the same criteria and managed objectively' (Private Further and Higher Education Institution, Annexure 4, p. 26).

Nevertheless, communities of practice and trust are seen to be emerging, both within particular sectors (CTP, Annexure 4, p. 27), for example, where '...[technikons] have established communities of trust with industry through cooperative education programmes and advisory boards', and across sectors with different jurisdictions (Health Professions Council of SA (HPCSA), Annexure 4, p. 27), such as

...the HPCSA ...[which] has already structured a co-operative arrangement with the Health and Welfare SETA, the effect of which is that the HWSETA will focus, for standard setting and quality assurance processes, on levels below 5 while the HPCSA will focus on levels 5 upwards...both parties have committed to a collaborative arrangement in which it is recognized that any qualifications below level 5, which leads to registration with the HPCSA, must actually be handled jointly with the HPCSA.

In addition, in the past, communities of practice have emerged as a result of the particular needs of a sub-sector (CHE/HEQC, Annexure 4, p. 27): 'An example is the tendency for professional bodies and employers to form links with [Higher Education] Band institutions'. Furthermore, such communities of practice could enrich 'a wider sectoral approach which can only breed a collaborative process...as opposed to a fragmented and individualistic process of standards setting and quality assurance' (HPCSA, Annexure 4, p. 27).

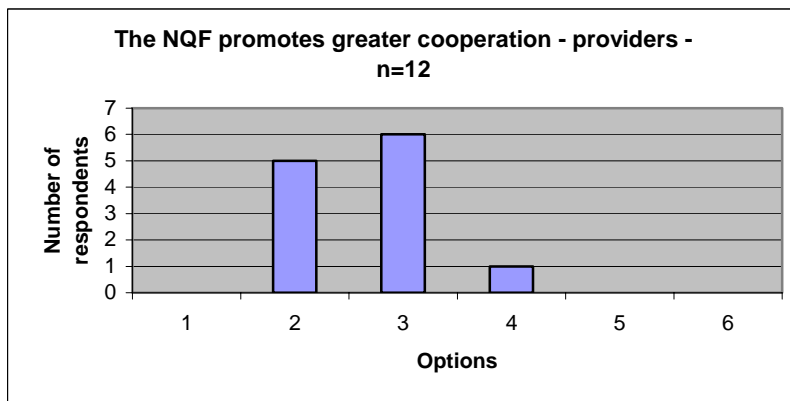
The quantitative data seem to support the emergence of such communities of practice. In response to the statement 'The NQF promotes/leads to greater *co-operation* between formal education system and the world of work and training', almost half of the respondents agreed that there is greater cooperation between different organisations (Figure 6.10).



**Fig. 6.10. Improved Cooperation between Different Organisations**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

However, 23% of the respondents disagree, while another 25% indicated that they did not know whether this is the case, or that it is still too soon to say. Further, in an analysis of the 'provider' responses to the same statement, it is evident that while 50% of respondents agree that co-operation has improved, 42% feel that this is not the case (Figure 6.11).



**Fig. 6.11. Improved Cooperation between Institutions**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

Nevertheless, it is clear that communities of practice are emerging and that such communities place a high premium on trust amongst partners. However, as the NSA

notes, the development of such communities has ‘to be governed by government regulations’ because ‘[v]oluntary alliances have proven inefficient and insufficient to ensure broad based implementation of the envisaged partnerships’ (Annexure 4, p. 28). SAUVCA agrees and maintains (Annexure 4, p. 26)

[practices, partnerships and “communities of trust”] between providers, users and bureaucratic systems are the essential elements which ensure that adequate and appropriate learning opportunities are provided and recognised. These crucial on-the-ground networks of shared understandings, agreements and cooperation that strengthen the possibility of delivery are not sufficiently addressed...This is the “realm” in which the effort of building communities of trust will be felt and which will impact most strongly on the ability of the system to meet the goals of the NQF.

SAUVCA, and other interviewees and respondents are referring to the ‘institutional logic’ that should support the ‘intrinsic logic’ of an integrated framework. They seem to suggest that the framework cannot rely on intrinsic logic alone, nor can it depend only on institutional logic to achieve integration, but that both are needed.

### *6.3.3 Conclusions – Policy Breadth as the Institutional Logic of the Framework*

It is evident that policy breadth, which could enhance the achievement of an integrated framework, has not yet been achieved, except in theory. While it is acknowledged that the SANQF is one of the elements of the human resources development strategy of the country, the political leadership needed for the structural and operational measures to enable alignment between the different sectors of education and training is seen to be lacking, not least in practical arrangements such as joint planning and funding. The lack of coordination, owing to the divided ownership of the SANQF, is seen to constrain the system, to the extent that education and training providers are finding it difficult to develop approaches that will enable the development of meaningful partnerships that could enhance joint qualification design, quality assurance and articulation routes through the system.

Nevertheless, the development of common standards and quality assurance measures, which are seen to facilitate the development of new communities of practice in the context of an education and training system where there was little trust between sectors, and which in turn, could enable integration to take place, is strongly supported by all respondents and interviewees. Quality assurance measures, against

agreed quality criteria in particular, are seen to engender trust in partners' systems and processes. However, common standards, agreed quality criteria and quality assurance measures still seem to be in the realm of the intrinsic logic of the framework, and the development of communities of practice seems to be limited to the standards generation bodies and to particular sub-sectors of the system. Nevertheless, these new communities of practice are not insignificant. It is such communities where the promise of the institutional logic of the framework, is located. It seems important that efforts of policy makers 'should be concentrated at the interface of practices and partnerships in order to build "communities of trust" and system mechanisms that will remove blockages and obstacles in the provision of increased access to quality learning opportunities' (SAUVCA, Annexure 4, p. 36).

#### **6.4 Conclusions – The Scope, Architecture and Policy Breadth of an Integrated Framework**

Chapter 6 focused on discussions of the scope, architecture and policy breadth of the SANQF. The SANQF is considered a comprehensive, unified qualifications framework. These aspects of the typology of qualifications framework are more in keeping with the espoused international purposes of education and training systems, namely that the qualifications systems are made clearer and that progression and articulation routes are described that will enable learners to move seamlessly within the system. As such, it is believed that the structure of the framework will enhance these objectives. In that regard, the SANQF has attempted to move beyond policy symbolism and ideology to the development of practical solutions that will facilitate the unification of education and training. Thus, in response to the Research Question, *Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the SANQF be made meaningful through an integrated framework?*, the scope of the framework, which deals with the *reach* of the framework, and the architecture, which deals with the *design features* of the framework and of qualifications were investigated.

The data confirm the fact that the more encompassing the scope of the framework aims to be, the more difficult it is to establish relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualification and, consequently, the more difficult it is to prevent dead ends for the learners attempting to make their way through the system. An all-



encompassing framework is therefore a necessary, but not a sufficient feature of a framework to enhance integration. The SANQF seems to have been conceptualised to address the reach, as well as the design of the elements within the framework. The design features deal particularly with the architecture of qualifications, and the degree of prescription associated with the acceptance of such qualifications for inclusion on the framework. Such prescription intends to enable comparability of qualifications at a particular level of the framework, and to enhance the portability of credits and articulation routes between different learning sites based on comparable elements of qualifications. However, the design of qualifications is not yet seen to be facilitating portability and articulation to any great degree, except in sub-sectors of the framework. This seems to stem from the perceived status of qualifications, the status of institutions offering such qualifications (public/public and public/private), the continuation of practices that characterised the previous education and training system, and the different regimes adopted for the delivery of learning programmes (e.g. modular versus semester courses). Further, the new proposals emanating from the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) seem to entrench a 'silo mentality', which is directly opposed to the principle of integration.

The data suggest that integration can only be achieved through the deliberate and concerted efforts of partners to define and describe articulation routes. Such articulation routes could be defined through qualification matrices and qualification maps and could be enhanced through foundation and access programmes.

However, it is evident that education and training providers felt that there are other constraints to the development of such relationships. The research question, *Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?*, investigated the institutional logic, that is the policy breadth needed to enhance integration. These measures include congruence between education and labour legislation, policy and regulation. Respondents and interviewees felt that the lack of agreement between the Departments of Education and Labour was constraining the development of communities of practice and trust. Nevertheless, the stakeholder principle, where stakeholders, as the representatives of the beneficiaries of the system, are involved with standards setting and quality assurance, was strongly supported, in contrast with the call, from the Departments in their proposals in the

*Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003), to reduce stakeholder participation. Standards setting structures and quality assurance measures are seen to be the *new* communities of practice and trust. However, these new communities of practice and trust seem to only emerge where there is a sectoral need to develop such a community. Hence, the call for more regulation, in the form of funding regimes and other governmental incentives, to encourage the development of networks that will go beyond competition between education and training institutions and financial gain. The on-the-ground networks emanating from meaningful collaboration are not yet evident. The intrinsic logic of a framework, on its own, cannot achieve an integration framework.

Chapter 7 will introduce the final two perspectives on integration, namely a continuum of learning and curricular integrability. These two perspectives seem to hold the greatest promise for the development of an integrated framework.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING: A CONTINUUM OF LEARNING

*The idea simply, that for the sake of looking ideologically elegant, education must simultaneously be training and training must simultaneously be education – listen, a human being has got only so much that he or she can do...<sup>1</sup>*

Chapter 6 investigated the extent to which the intrinsic and institutional logics of a qualifications framework could enhance the development and implementation of an integrated framework. While the intrinsic logic, that is the structure of the framework and the design of qualifications, could facilitate integration, it became evident that much of these aspects are still at a conceptual level. The constraints in achieving integration highlighted the difficulties associated with theoretical constructs, which do not seem to take sufficient account of on-the-ground contexts. Thus, it seems that integration, from the perspective of scope, architecture and policy breadth, is a top-down attempt to effect changes in the education and training system. As with policy symbolism and ideology (Chapter 5), such attempts do not seem to be enough to effect the changes envisaged for the system. This chapter investigates the ‘persuasive logic locked up in daily practice’ and ‘the richness of ways in which institutions seek to attain the goals of the framework’<sup>2</sup>. The final research question, namely Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning? therefore seeks to investigate the persuasive logic emerging from a pragmatic need of sectors and institutions to embody the principles of the SANQF. This question deals firstly with the seemingly opposing epistemologies characteristic of education and of training, which ‘have co-existed uneasily within the common qualifications framework’<sup>3</sup>. The continuum of education and training is discussed in 7.2. Secondly, the research question deals with the emergence of curricula, which increasingly combine theory and practice, to better reflect the needs of learners and workplaces in relation to developing solid theoretical groundings, complemented by practical experience. This part of the question is discussed in 7.3. The chapter is concluded, in 7.4, with commentary on the extent to which the

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<sup>1</sup> Saleem Badat, Chief Executive Officer, Council on Higher Education

<sup>2</sup> Jansen, 2004, p. 90

<sup>3</sup> DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 6.

*complementarity of education and training is enhanced through an integrated framework.*

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses an integrated framework from the perspective of a ‘continuum of learning’ and ‘curricular integrability’ (refer to Chapter 3). It investigates the two main epistemologies associated with education and with training as the opposite poles of an education and training system. Increasingly, it seems that there is recognition that these epistemologies are not easily separated and that a rigid view of such epistemologies is a false duality, as in practice these are not mutually exclusive. The convergence of education and training epistemologies becomes particularly evident with the emergence of the combination of theory and practice (and workplace-based learning) in curricula and learning programmes as a reflection of changes in a system that attempts to be more relevant to the world of work. The lens of ‘integration as curricular integrability’ is used to explore such changes in approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Table 7.1 draws the relationship between Research Question 4 and the conceptual framework for the study.

**Table 7.1**

***The Relationship between Research Question 4 and the Conceptual Framework***

<b>Main research question</b>	
To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?	
<b>Supporting question</b>	<b>Conceptual framework</b>
Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?	Integration as continua of learning. Integration as curricular integrability.

The complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning and the structural arrangements that will enhance such complementarity are thus the focus of Chapter 7.

The data drawn upon for these findings emerge from the following sources:

- Unstructured interviews
- Interviews conducted for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study
- ‘Learner’ and ‘Union’ focus groups

- Survey questionnaire data and supporting interviews for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study
- Focus Groups for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study
- Responses to '*An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System*'

The integration of theory and practice as a perspective on the development of an integrated framework was well supported in the unstructured interviews with six board members of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (Annexure 1). Likewise, in the 'Provider' interviews, for Cycle 1 of the NQF Impact Study, the question 4.1) *Has the implementation of the NQF contributed to a national acceptance of an integrated approach to education and training?* supported by prompts: *To what extent is there integration between education and training?; What are the inter-organisational agreements, e.g. between institutions and workplaces?* and *How is practical application and experiential learning reflected in curricula and learning programmes?* found much resonance with the interviewees.

'Learner' and 'Union' focus groups could also easily respond to the question 3.3) *To what extent do your courses combine educational theory with training practice and experience?* The survey questionnaire statement relevant to this chapter is 2.5.5) *Both theory and practice are included in NQF qualifications.* As with the previous data-sets, respondents and interviewees related easily to the statement (Annexure 1). The 'Practitioner' focus group question *Do NQF qualifications promote the integration of theory and practice?* for Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study, also provided valuable data. As before, the responses to '*An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System*', produced a rich variety of comments and perspectives on continua of learning and curricular integrability (Annexure 4).

### 7.1.1 *Emerging Themes*

This Research Question evidenced three main themes. The first theme concerns the perceived incommensurability of education and training epistemologies, related to the hierarchies of learning associated with these two poles of the education and training system. The second theme has to do with the increasing convergence of qualifications to 'the middle', that is qualifications, curricula and learning programmes that reflect the need to build solid theoretical groundings through discipline-based study, but

which are also, through the incorporation of authentic practice into programmes, attempting to improve relevance to workplaces and, consequently, improve employability of the holders of qualifications. The third theme deals with curricula, which are increasingly reflecting a combination of theory and practice, and the necessary collaborative approaches through partnerships to enhance the complementarity of these aspects of the learning programme.

## 7.2 A Continuum of Learning

The concept of the ‘continuum of learning’ was first introduced into the NQF discourse in South Africa by the Study Team tasked with the review of the SANQF (DoE & DoL, 2002, p. 68):

The concept [a continuum of learning] preserves the valuable notion of a single inter-connected learning system, which has been of fundamental importance to the transformation process...But at the risk of going over old ground, we affirm that an integrated approach should not mean erasing all differences between education and training or making all qualifications fit a single set of criteria (except for the minimum necessary requirements). The perceived threat of such an idea has given rise to fears, expressed in many submissions to the Study Team, that the essential, distinct purposes of education and training may be undermined.

This quotation encapsulates the three sub-themes emerging from the data in this section: the principle of difference and the principle of equivalence (Young, 2003); the distinct purposes of education and training (Tuck, Hart and Keevy, 2004); and the changes in the relationships between different types of learning (Raffe, 2005).

### 7.2.1 *The Principle of Difference and the Principle of Equivalence*

Young, (2005, p. 17) maintains that not until the introduction of the first national qualifications framework was there an attempt ‘to bring together academic and vocational qualifications, schools and university qualifications or the different types of professional and vocational qualifications within a single framework, [which] inevitably...created problems of progression, transferability and portability’. Nevertheless, rightly or wrongly, it seems to be precisely for this reason that the South African system opted to achieve equivalence by placing qualifications from education and training sectors at the same level on the framework. The socio-political imperatives emanating from a past unfair system of discrimination, perceived privilege and lack of opportunity, were associated with restrictive pathways and thus,

different pathways were conceptualised that were meant to lead to the same result, that is qualifications of equal status. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) (Annexure 4, p. 31), for example, argues that the distinct tracks for education, training and occupationally based (workplace-based) qualifications proposed in the *Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003) have ‘a major impact on access to equal opportunities by learners...[E]ven in the current NQF system it is still difficult for learners who could not pursue academic training to have an opportunity to prove himself/herself’. However, the socio-political imperatives seemed to have masked real and important epistemological issues (Raffe, 2005). The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (Annexure 4, p. 31) therefore says that ‘differences between modes of learning should not be trivialised or seen as easily “overcome”’:

Discipline-based learning (mainly in institutions) and occupational context-based learning (mainly in the workplace) can be represented as two “poles of a continuum” but this should not obscure the hierarchical differences between the two types of learning.

Other commentators agree. The Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), for example, (Annexure 4, p. 31) notes that ‘different modes of learning are associated with differing levels of abstraction, with the greatest level of abstraction on the discipline-learning side’. Thus:

*These different ways of knowing have implications for the equivalence of qualifications. Discipline-learning at a particular level cannot be equated to work-based learning at the same level. Although there may be parity of esteem of learners on the same level, it does not mean that the qualifications are comparable and equal (emphases in the original).*

The CHE supports this view and maintains that the differences between qualification types should be recognised, but that socially acceptable comparabilities should be established, ‘as opposed to assuming epistemological equivalence’ between them (Annexure 4, p. 34).

Likewise, Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training, maintains that (Annexure 4, p. 33)

[i]nstitutional and disciplinary knowledge and education on the one hand and workplace-based knowledge and education on the other hand are not just different, they exist in a hierarchical relationship to each other. It is worth pointing out that a national framework of qualifications, because qualifications are a statement or proxy for learning that has taken

place, is of necessity arranged hierarchically in terms of breadth and depth of learning. The conditions for learning with breadth and depth are, of necessity found in formal education institutions, because workplaces are unlikely to have the time or the trained and experienced staff to enable such learning to happen.

Thus it seems that there has been a conceptual conflation of education and training. The Chief Executive Officer of the CHE argues that ‘there is a conceptual distinction to be made between education and training – I think we have tried to either conflate them or we tried to pretend that there are no problems or tensions’ (Annexure 1, p.45). This is a long-standing debate. In a 1996 discussion document, the *Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF*, summarised the debate as follows (p. 18):

Essentially, the debate divided itself into two schools of thought, namely one which wanted no distinction drawn between education and training and one which wanted them to exist in parallel tracks, joined by some kind of umbrella body, a far more tentative approach towards the integration of education and training...The education sector was concerned that education would lose its “soul”, that it would become narrow in focus, concentrating only on teaching that which was required by the world of work – training, in other words. At the centre of their concern was the fear that education standards would decrease rapidly if training was to prescribe to education...The training sector, on the other hand, was afraid that the integration of education and training would lead to unreasonable demands for “high” academic standards in the training world; an imposition, it was claimed, that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for those who trained workers to adjust rapidly to employment demands when required.

Thus, Young (2003, p. 9) maintains that the principle of equivalence is fundamentally misleading and that this principle is ‘more about aspirations to equality than reality’. In reality, it seems that discipline-based and workplace-based qualifications cannot be seen as equivalent, and that ‘[i]t is not useful, therefore, to create a perception of a framework in which all qualifications can be obtained in...three pathways, [including a workplace-based pathway] when in fact it does not seem realistic that higher levels of learning can be reached in the workplace’ (Umalusi, Annexure 4, p. 6).

Therefore, Raffe (2005, p. 22) argues that

[i]n more recent policy debates integration has been associated, not with uniformity, but with diversity. An integrated qualifications framework is one that recognises and celebrates a wide range of purposes,



epistemologies, modes and contexts of learning, but which also recognises the need to build these into a coherent and coordinated system.

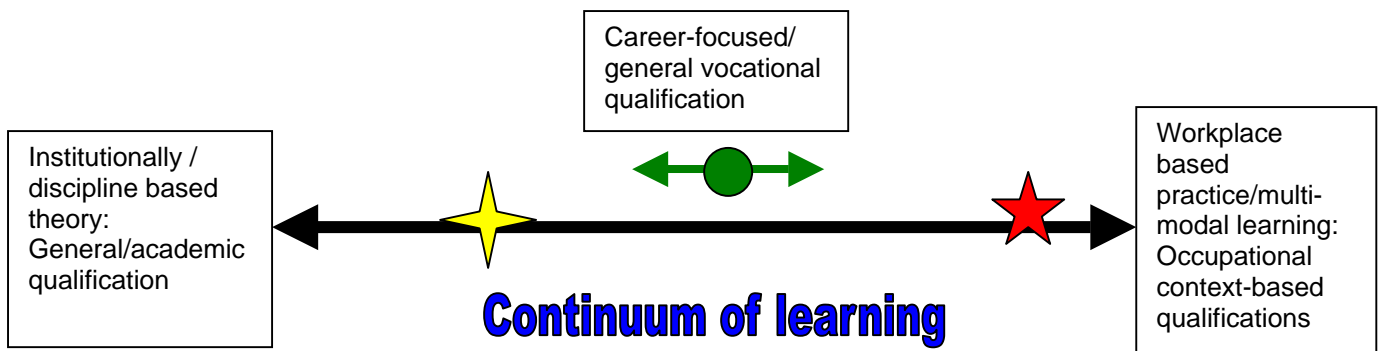
The interviewees agree. For example, a SAQA Board member says that ‘I do not see an integrated framework as making all things equal...[T]his is the misperception in the integrated system...that we are trying to make everyone into recognised as having degrees’ (Annexure 1, p. 26). Another SAQA Board member points out that the distinct purposes of education and training should be maintained (Annexure 1, p. 15):

...[A] lot of us can't see the wood for the trees. If you look at the trees, there is the vocational education tree and there is the academic tree...and we don't see the wood...the wood is the NQF. You don't want to say [for example] that Bobby Godsell is equivalent to a professor in management at the university – there is no equivalence, but they must get equivalent status.

Thus, while the debate about opposing epistemologies may, in a sense, stand ‘proxy for other deeply rooted ideas about the very nature and purpose of learning’ (Heyns & Needham, 2004, p. 35), against the background of the socio-political imperatives of the SANQF, the debate seems to have been complicated with objections that are too easily ‘dismissed as recalcitrant, elitist, or simply racist (Ensor, 2003, p. 326). Rather, ‘to facilitate access, progression, and equity, the trick is not to assert that everything is the same, but to recognise differences and put in place the mechanisms necessary to negotiate them’ (Ensor, 2003, p. 345). One such mechanism seems to be to focus on the distinct purposes of qualifications and the value that such qualifications may add to a particular context.

### 7.2.2 *The Distinct Purposes of Qualifications*

Umalusi (Annexure 4, p. 33) suggests that quality assurance and curriculum issues take on different meanings according to the purposes of qualifications. It further maintains that qualifications under its ambit have *foundation* and *access* to further learning and further training purposes, suggesting that these qualifications are to be found at the one end of the continuum of education and training and, perhaps, that its qualifications are incommensurable with qualifications at the other end of the continuum, which has an occupational orientation. In the conceptual framework for this study (Chapter 3), the continuum of education and training is represented in Figure 7.1.



**Figure 7.1: Integration as a Continuum of Learning**

Umalusi thus places its qualifications on the left-hand side of the continuum, with tentative links towards the middle of the continuum, but seems to suggest that such links cannot extend to the right-hand side of the continuum.

A senior official of the National Department of Education supports the view that education and training are incommensurable and notes (Annexure 1, p. 44):

Advocates of integration in education and training really ignore the fundamental difference between the epistemological basis of education [and training]. They can't integrate the two in the sense that people talk about it. The features of training are fairly easily measurable. You can judge behaviour by looking at people, but it is not the same with education. Some of the things one does in terms of education cannot be controlled because it is a mental thing. With education we infer, we do not know, that you can think logically.

However, most of the other respondents and commentators consider such a view as a *caricature* of education and training. Raffe (2005, p. 26) notes that the polarisation of education and training is not helpful:

...[M]any of the epistemological barriers...may have more to do with the particular design of the qualifications framework than with integration per se. The Scottish experience shows that a unitised and (loosely) outcomes-based model can accommodate academic learning. Conversely, when the UK introduced a very tight model for National Vocational Qualifications there was fierce opposition from within vocational education and training. The problem was the model, not integration. *The argument is further confused by being polarised in terms of education and training – or rather, in terms of caricatures of education and training* (emphasis added).

The CHE agrees and says that such a caricature 'leads to a stunted conception of workplace learning' (Annexure 4, p. 35), and thus

[w]orkers will be trained only in those skills they require as workers, not as citizens or members of the community who deserve an education that respects and nurtures their dignity and worth as creative human beings.

As a result, this may give primacy only to the (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 35)

...extrinsic or instrumental goals of education and training such as social and economic development (narrowly conceived) and excludes important intrinsic goals such as intellectual development and personal autonomy that are central to values such as human dignity and self-expression.

The CTP agrees with this position and says (Annexure 4, p. 36)

[o]ur position is further supported by widespread acknowledgement of a trend of learning (and thus qualifications) which focuses on both economically useful knowledge as well as the development of ways of knowledge that will promote innovation, creativity, adaptability and flexibility in individuals. Learning should therefore support preparation for economic participation *now* and in the *future*, as well as prepare learners for good citizenship (emphases in the original).

A SAQA Board Member describes the complementarity of discipline-based and vocationally-oriented qualifications as follows (Annexure 1, p. 47):

Universities are science-based, technikons [universities of technology are] technology based – the technology cannot live without the science of universities...The science, and the thinking and the new knowledge, should be formed by universities...a dissertation at the technikon should be applying [science].

The Chief Executive Officer of the CHE agrees and maintains that engineers, for example, from the opposite poles of the continuum of learning, have different, but complementary roles: ‘...certain engineers actually deal with conceptual design issues and ...others deal with other issues and they really constitute a team’ (Annexure 1, p. 50).

Another SAQA Board Member points out that qualifications should thus make it possible for learners to change tack should they so wish. The proposed National Certificate: Vocational<sup>4</sup>, in his opinion is problematic because (Annexure 1, p. 51)

...they want this to look just like the National Senior Certificate [the new school-leaving qualification], but with more technical words in it. They aren’t linking it explicitly enough to the world of work, they haven’t engaged potential employers actively enough...[who are pushing] for

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<sup>4</sup> To be offered by the newly constituted Further Education and Training Institutions.

probably a less academic, more skills-based training, but having enough academic [learning] in there so that if someone buzzes, then they can get back into the academic route.

Other SAQA Board Members agree, particularly because ‘our entire schooling system is set up to prepare people for university – even the [Further Education and Training colleges] are now trying to do that’ and, in line with the purposes of qualifications on the continuum of learning, it is ‘absolutely ridiculous if you think about it’ (Annexure 1, p. 52):

...[O]nly 2.5% of people that start schooling ever go into higher education and then only 1% make it, I mean, of those who start school. The other 99% have to be prepared for work. But why is this idea that going to university so absolutely vital in our society? ...[I]t is a social thing...but that is why we don’t have skills in this country, that’s why we can’t run the country and start [to] grow the economy because we all think that the ideal thing for your child is to go to university – because they don’t get recognition [elsewhere].

Therefore, it seems that if learning is conceptualised as a continuum, or several continua, according to Raffe (2005, p. 23), then the distinct purposes of qualifications should be recognised and valued. However, it then seems to become more important to ensure articulation routes along the continuum of education and training. Thus, articulation routes should enable mobility along the continuum by recognising that some parts of the learning in occupationally based or workplace-based contexts could facilitate mobility from the occupationally based pole of the continuum to the academic pole. This is supported by the views of many of the commentators. For example, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) maintains that ‘articulation inevitably requires making up for deficiencies in the fundamental underpinnings requiring a move to the “left”...before moving “right” again’ (Annexure 4, p. 36), as depicted in Figure 7.2 (Blom, 2006c, p. 12).

NQF Band	General/academic	Articulation	General/vocational	Articulation	Trade/occupational/ professional
HE	Discipline-based	Credits	Career-focused	Credits	Occupational
FE	Discipline-based	Credits	Vocational qualifications	Credits	recognition or context-based workplace qualifications
GE	General education qualifications				

**Figure 7.2: Articulation and Credit Transfer Routes from Occupationally Based Qualifications to General/Academic Qualifications**

**Key:** Red arrow – traditional progression routes  
 Green arrow – progression routes from occupationally based qualifications, to disciplinary based qualifications, back into occupationally based progression routes

The CHE agrees, and maintains that ‘progression may often start in a pathway “unique to the workplace”, but will inevitably not end in that pathway’ (Annexure 4, p. 36).

This seems to be what the Departments (DoE & DoL, 2003, p. 14) mean when they state: ‘Learning pathways cannot be sealed off from one another, as though a learner is fated to stay on one route once a choice has been made’ and thus, articulation should enable progression to those ‘who are seeking to enter or progress in or change a career pathway, or equip themselves for admission to higher education, or both’.

Many respondents agree with this position. The Executive Officer of SAQA, for example, says that ‘there are multiple dimensions to integration’ (Annexure 1, p. 28):

For example, there is a kind of a career path that goes from school to university. Then there is another kind of career path for school “drop-outs” – the old technical college, [the] new [Further Education and Training] college, and then moving back somewhere, back into maybe universities of technology and maybe something else later on...Now, part of what integration must do, is that although people are using different pathways, the pathways [should not] restrict...

The distinct purposes of qualifications then become a mechanism to strengthen the system when the question is asked: ‘What is the basket of knowledge, competencies, skills and attributes required for any particular occupation in this country?’ (Chief Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 37):

...[S]ome of them will veer much more to the educational and theoretical and so on, and others will veer more to the practical – and that is how you approach it – and that’s how I think you don’t necessarily dissolve [the tension between education and training], but you approach it in a different way altogether (Annexure 1, p. 44).

This seems to be in keeping with the increasing convergence of ‘education’ and ‘training’. An Education and Training Quality Assurance body, for example, notes that (Annexure 4, p. 34)

...some knowledge-based industries are probably closer to the academic path than [a] simplistic description of workplace learning...Academic learning should feed into the real world needs of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to address the skills shortage and ensure that educated people are also employable. Discipline-based learning alone may render learners unemployable as is currently the case with many school leavers and graduates.

The CTP agrees, and maintains that ‘experiential learning is more than skill alone...it is more useful to identify what theory or experiential learning is outstanding when considering progression on a career path via identified qualifications’ (Annexure 4, p. 34). Further, according to the CTP, each point along the continuum has a particular role to play in achieving the end result. ‘We agree that public providers cannot provide for specific job skills and generally have a more broad career focus. This does not preclude articulation between specific work-based learning and public education institutions.’

The very notion of incommensurable epistemologies is thus challenged by many examples of where the opposite poles of the continuum already support each other. An Education and Training Quality Assurance body notes that (Annexure 4, p. 34)

...it can easily be concluded that there are a substantial number of qualifications which are offered at institutions which ought to give considerable attention to skills development within the related occupation or profession, if they are to be considered worthwhile.

SAUVCA supports this view and argues that it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between the different poles on the continuum (Annexure 4, p. 35):

Furthermore, we note the trend in higher education qualifications – in South Africa and internationally – to converge towards the middle of the continuum of learning modes; i.e. for discipline-based learning to become more skills-based and employability conscious and for workplace learning increasingly to include some form of generic skills development.

### 7.2.3 *Conclusions – The Continuum of Learning*

In an attempt to improve progression, transferability and portability, national qualifications frameworks seem to have stressed the principle of equivalence, as opposed to the principle of difference, characteristic of education and training systems of the past. South Africa has been no exception in this regard; the socio-political background of the system under apartheid has led to the call for alternative routes to the same end, namely qualifications of equal esteem. However, it is evident that a workplace-based route to the achievement of qualifications does not have a one-on-one hierarchical relationship to qualifications achieved in institutionally based contexts. The respondents and commentators make it clear that they do not believe that the same level of abstraction can be taught in workplace-based environments, partly because it is not the 'core business' of workplaces to do so and thus, workplaces do not have the expertise to offer this kind of learning. Nevertheless, respondents and commentators argue that there should be other socially accepted comparabilities to achieve equivalent status, but not equivalent epistemologies. It should also be noted that neither the academic, nor the vocational/occupational critics of an integrated framework felt that the distinct purposes, aims and objectives of education and training should be lost. Thus, the social status seems to be what underlies the call for 'equivalence', that is that qualifications acquired through workplace-based routes are not considered inferior to qualifications achieved elsewhere in the system. The principle of difference, understood as qualifications with distinct purposes, in a coherent system, is strongly supported. A continuum of learning, therefore, reflects the place, purpose and role of a particular qualification within the education and training system. Many respondents and commentators warned against a seemingly outdated view of education and training, namely a caricature of education and training, leading in particular, to a stunted view of workplace-based learning. In their opinion, there is an increasing convergence of both elements of the system, where a complementary relationship between these elements is more useful in a modern education and training system. However, in a coherent system, this seems to mean that, in order to award equal esteem to these elements, there is a need to enable articulation along the continuum. To improve the coherence of the system it seems not only necessary to describe articulation and progression pathways, but also to build the education *and* training elements into qualifications, curricula and learning programmes, that is to 'combine different types

of learning (e.g. applied and theoretical) to develop integrated forms of learning and knowledge, to promote transferable and generic skills, or to promote parity of esteem' (Raffe, 2005, p. 24).

### 7.3 Curricular Integrability

Raffe (2005, p. 22) points out that '[a]n integrated framework is one that not only includes different types of learning, but also changes the relationships between them'. From the previous section it is becoming evident that, while education and training represent 'distinct knowledge structures, distinct modes of learning and distinct social relations' (Raffe, 2005, p. 22), the notion of the incommensurability of these poles of the continuum of learning seems to be a 'false dualism' (Pring, 2004). Education and training, as practices, are not mutually exclusive and, therefore, 'the differences are of a degree and they can shade into one another' (Raffe, 2005, p. 22). Mehl (2004, p. 40) agrees and maintains:

It has become apparent that the notion of workplaces as focused users of narrow skills with very limited portability to other economic sectors is completely outdated. Within what is now called the "knowledge economy", workplaces are recognised as multi-faceted, inter-disciplinary knowledge environments not at all limited to a narrow technical skills-based [environment]. The emphasis in today's workplaces on values, life skills, communication, management as well as a diversity of sector-specific knowledge-areas, redefines it as a developer of specific, general and highly portable competencies.

It is therefore evident that 'work' and 'learning' are becoming far less polarised. In the past, 'learning' was about 'education'. '[I]t occurred in life before work' (Boud and Garrick, 1999), while 'work' was associated with 'training' and, consequently, learning at work was never considered as valuable (or valid) as learning that had taken place in educational institutions. However, increasingly there is the recognition that workplaces are important 'sites of learning' (Boud and Garrick, 1999) and that the two sites – institutions and workplaces – could be complementary to each other and not in opposition. Boud and Garrick (1999, p. 1) note the following:

Learning at work has become one of the most exciting areas of development in the dual fields of management and education. It has moved to become a central concern of corporations and universities; it is no longer the preoccupation of a small band of vocational training specialists. A new focus on learning is changing the way businesses see themselves. At the same time, educational institutions are realising that



they need to engage with the world of work in a more sophisticated manner than ever before.

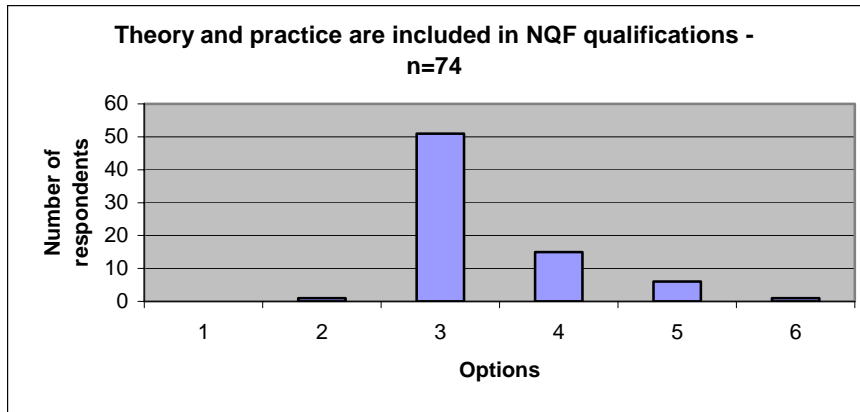
Many of the interviewees and commentators agree. This is evident from the many comments about ‘a stunted view of workplace learning’ and of the ‘dumbing-down of workplace learning’ if it is isolated from discipline-based learning (CHE, Annexure 4, p. 35). Further, in a draft discussion document published by the CHE, the pressure on educational institutions to approach the mix of theory and practice, with a particular emphasis on employability, is an emerging aspect (CHE, 2001, p. 11):

Higher education institutions are expected to be far more responsive to societal needs at a concrete and instrumental level. Whereas previously, higher education was allowed to impose its own definitions of knowledge on society, society is now demanding that higher education provides more instrumental definitions of knowledge and more operational knowledge products. Globally, higher education is now expected to focus on the employability of its graduates and to contribute, at least in part, to national economic development.

This has implications for the way in which qualifications are designed, and the ways in which curricula and learning programmes are conceptualised and enacted. This section will deal with two sub-themes: the epistemological mix (or curricular integration) required to achieve the purpose of a qualification in a particular context, which will meet the needs of that specific context, including the employability of its graduates; and the partnerships that are needed to enact curricula and learning programmes.

### *7.3.1 The Mix of Theory and Practice*

In response to the survey questionnaire statement, ‘Both theory and practice are included in NQF qualifications’, an overwhelming majority (89%) of respondents agreed, or strongly agreed (Figure 7.3).



**Figure 7.3 Both Theory and Practice are Included in NQF Qualifications**

**Key:** Option 1: Strongly disagree      Option 4: Strongly agree  
 Option 2: Disagree                      Option 5: Don't know  
 Option 3: Agree                            Option 6: Too soon to say

The quantitative responses to the survey questionnaire are supported by many comments from interviewees. A public Further Education and Training college, for example, maintains that 'even the more backward providers know that theory and practice is what is going to get the learner into a workplace' and thus 'you cannot take theory and practice apart, they [are] actually two sides of the same coin' (Annexure 1, p. 49). Therefore, the question asked is, 'How do you respond to those needs and how do you integrate the practical need to the other side of things, which is theory?' (Private Further Education and Training college, Annexure 1, p. 48).

However, many interviewees argue that the balance between theory and practice, particularly practice that will enhance employability, has not yet been achieved in academic education in public schools and universities. This is seen as problematic as 'companies will look for someone with hands-on [training]' and therefore 'companies would go for the Technikon guy' (Employer, Annexure 1, p. 48). Another employer agrees (Annexure 1, p. 48):

I would say that in universities...they do a little bit too much theory...but you know in university you have to cover that...to know the work in depth, and it's important to do all that theory. I will say that to do a little bit more practical as well...I always say there is too much theory, there is not enough practical.

In addition, a participant from an organised labour focus group noted that, ‘I came from the academic school...I had to learn much harder to get my training than the normal guy’ (Annexure 1, p. 48). Other interviewees agree (Annexure 1, p. 52):

To me it appears that the matric [school-leaving] certificate by itself is not a very useful thing...because to what extent does it prepare you for anything other than maybe university or further studies. It doesn’t necessarily prepare you for a job in the labour market...[I]f you are in a country where people do not necessarily have money for further studies...you have this pool of people with matric certificates who should be going to the labour market. The [learners] can’t, because they don’t necessarily have the skills.

A public Higher Education institution supports this view and asks, ‘So many people are going to universities, but how many of them are getting employed? They are using employment opportunities as the indicator of the value of education and training’ (Annexure 1, p. 53) and, consequently, institutions are seeking to become more ‘market-oriented’ (Annexure 1, p. 53):

...[D]egrees are not found to be applicable directly to the market and so what [institutions] have done was to say “okay, you get your degree, you spend about six to nine months in a special programme...in which you apply the theory you have learnt to a variety of industrial applications...with participants from [industry], so that you then become market-oriented”.

This supports an argument that education is becoming too focused on employability, and that a better balance is needed (National Department of Education, Annexure 1, p. 47):

...[O]ver the past five years we have perhaps concentrated too much on the economic development rather than the social development and that is reflected in the quantity of programmes we have developed. The fact that those programmes have all been about skilling for employment rather than social responsibility shows that we have not been balanced.

Allais (2003, p. 312) argues that the emergence of ‘education for employment’ arises from the introduction of a ‘neo-liberal economic policy; the dominant market-oriented orthodoxy [which] has given rise to new perspectives on the purposes of education’, which in turn is linked to ‘employment, economic improvement, and international competitiveness’. COSATU, (Annexure 4, p. 37) agrees, and warns that there seems to be an over-emphasis of ‘economic needs at the expense of social and political

development needs [which] does not facilitate the attainment of transformation in the education and training architecture as entrenched by the apartheid government’.

The notion of ‘education for employment’ is perhaps not surprising in the South African context where vast disparities still exist between rich and poor, and between privileged and under-privileged. However, the attempt to address such social problems through an education and training system is not unique to South Africa (Allais, 2003), and the challenge seems to be to achieve the right balance between educational goals and the danger of increasing the vocationalism of education. Such a balance seems to include the appropriate mix of education and training so that ‘there [is] a link, without that practical link, that qualification means nothing’ (Employer, Annexure 1, p. 48). A good balance seems to be the recognition of what is needed in workplaces in order for curricula to be responsive to such needs. SADTU supports this position and says, ‘What people learn in universities is different to what is done at workplace[s] and there is no link between the two’ (Annexure 1, p. 36).

Nevertheless, there is much evidence of changing practice: ‘...[W]hat is happening in the course will take you to the workplace...practical assessment shows that theory is being carried into the workplace’ (Employer, Annexure 1, p. 49). A public Higher Education institution agrees, and notes, ‘I’m beginning to see an improvement in our [curriculum] whereby the assessment is strongly linked to workplace learning’ (Annexure 1, p. 53).

The South African Council for Educators (SACE) takes this further, to changes in practice at the qualification design level (Annexure 1, p. 36):

You see we have put together a qualifications framework with the balance of education and training. That is why a lot of our [Higher Education institutions] can’t offer those qualities because they only have the one part of the qualification that they have expertise in. So, they find fault in the qualifications and honestly [do not recognise] that they need to shed their own way of looking at the qualifications because they only have the academic and not the training and development [of teachers in mind].

Further, a Department of Labour interviewee supports the balance of education and training and argues that (Annexure 1, p. 54)

...at least there's a recognition now, if we talk about learning, that we're not talking about sitting at a desk and studying and working. We're now also talking about the workplace, behind a sewing machine, you're also busy with working and training.

Thus, 'what we are talking about is what kind of combination do we want to have in a graduate or anyone that is simultaneously education and training' (Chief Executive Officer, CHE, Annexure 1, p. 50). A public Higher Education institution, therefore, maintains that the curriculum and learning programmes should reflect such a combination (Annexure 1, p. 51):

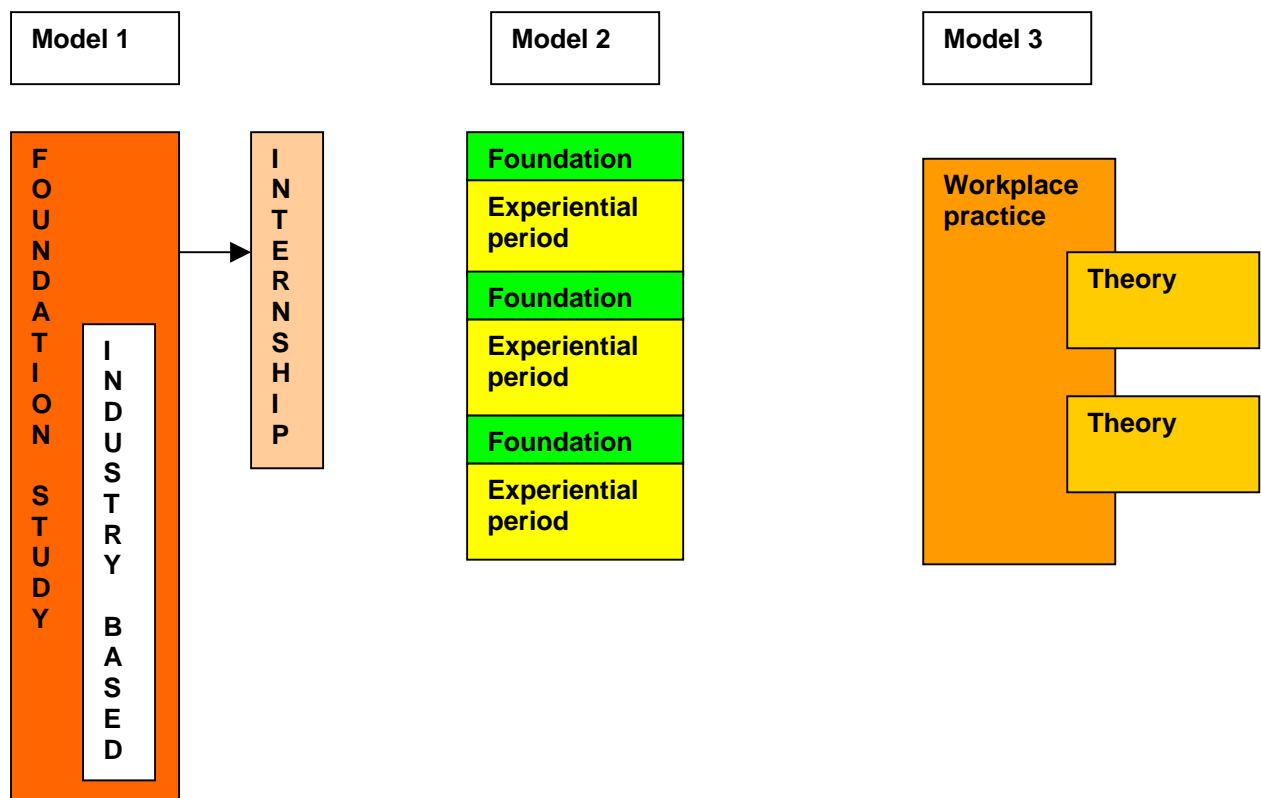
We have grappled with the structural reconfiguration...[t]he actual modifications that need to happen, the deepening of curriculum design...[W]e have realised that the real problem-based learning approach must have theory introduced, so we are looking at an approach that has both foundational and theoretical knowledge and application in the workplace and a reflection back to theory in terms of Kolb.

The Engineering Council of South Africa agrees and talks about the 'appropriate mix of institutional and workplace learning' (Annexure 4, p. 37). Two Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (FASSET and the South African Institute for Chartered Accountants (SAICA)) support this notion and argue that, in their sectors, qualifications straddle institutionally based learning and workplace-based practice (Annexure 4, p. 37) and therefore there should be a balance of workplace learning and institutionally based learning. Furthermore, in their sectors, the balance of theory and practice in the curriculum is inextricably linked to their learners' right to practise. SAUVCA supports the notion that theory and practice, in appropriate quantities, should be an integral part of the curriculum (Annexure 4, p. 37):

SAUVCA supports workplace learning that is part of a well-structured curriculum, designed especially to afford opportunities to learners to apply theory to practice and to learning workplace skills. Such learning has many forms such as clinicals, practicals, experiential learning components, cooperative learning and service learning.

From the 'appropriate mix', namely through the combinations of theory and practice, emerges the perspective of curricular integrability. Along the continuum of education and training, and in keeping with the purposes of the qualification, the 'measure of integration of theoretical and practical components as contained in the...curriculum' (Keevy, 2006, p. 9) becomes evident. In the conceptual framework for this study (Chapter 3), the ratio of theory and practice, in relation to where the qualification is

placed on the continuum of learning, is presented. Model 1 (see Figure 7.4) depicts a disciplinary-based qualification as the foundation for workplace practice in the form of internships, which, at its conclusion, could lead to professional recognition and the right of the holder of the qualification to practise in the profession. In addition, disciplinary-based qualifications are increasingly linked to ‘industry-based learning’, which is part and parcel of the curriculum and requires the successful conclusion, through industry based assessment, of this part of the qualification before the qualification is awarded. These qualifications would be placed at the left of the continuum of education and training (Figure 7.1). In Figure 7.4, Model 2 depicts a curriculum that requires cyclical periods of disciplinary based learning and experiential learning, which places this type of qualification in the middle of the continuum, while Model 3 represents a curriculum where learners are placed within workplaces for ‘structured work experience’, supported by ‘structured institutionally based learning’, for example, a learnership (Bellis, 2000, p. 219). This type of qualification is placed on the right of the continuum.



**Figure 7.4: Integration as Curricular Integrability**

There is much support for the appropriate mix of theory and practice. The National Skills Authority (NSA) (Annexure 4, p. 37) argues for ‘linked qualifications...that incorporate theory and practice, and thus achieve integration between education and training’. The NSA maintains that

[t]he design of trade, occupational, and professional qualifications should be based on models that have worked well in the past. The best element and practices in these models should be used as a model for “linked qualifications”.

Artisans and professionals both undergo “education” and “training” that culminates in a qualification, which gives them elite status in the labour market. The theory and practice *complement* one another and lead to “expertise”, which is recognised internationally and affords those who are qualified mobility and portability across the globe (emphasis in original).

The CHE argues that much of the existing provision of higher education can also be viewed as complementary (Annexure 4, p. 38):

Firstly, there is much research and teaching within higher education that is focused **on** the workplace. Secondly, restricting workplace learning to learning **in** the workplace ignores the key role played by research in higher education and training qualifications (emphases in the original).

The CTP agrees (Annexure 4, p. 38):

The traditional view of the delivery of education and training in HE is that discipline learning takes place in universities and skills development in the workplace. The integration of these two modes of learning is currently largely represented by the delivery in technikons. In this latter form of delivery, interdependence certainly is a major factor in the delivery. Technikon programmes, by their very nature as career-oriented programmes, integrate education and training.

Therefore, the integration of theory and practice, in appropriate combinations, seem to encourage institutions to seek ways in which ‘we weight...[and] we value different kinds of learning’. It results in asking questions such as, ‘...Do you do separated curriculum...and bring it all together at a later stage, or do you start to integrate right from the start?’ (Executive Officer, SAQA, Annexure 1, p. 21 and 48).

However, curricular integration seems to require institutions and workplaces to develop a much more structured relationship. ‘[C]ollaboration between HE and industry should...be improved, so that the practice components of professional and career-oriented qualifications can be performed in authentic contexts’ (CTP,

Annexure 4, p. 38). It seems evident that curricular integration could be enhanced if it is supported by partnerships and collaboration, which will facilitate the enactment of the curriculum.

### 7.3.2 *Partnerships and Collaboration as Integration*

”Integration” in the sense of partnerships between education and training and the value that these two opposite poles of the learning spectrum could add to the other, in terms of opportunities to apply knowledge and inform knowledge production...seems to be accepted and understood (Heyns and Needham, 2004, p. 43).

SAUVCA (Annexure 4, p. 38) argues that a future higher education system should seek to equip participants in higher education with a ‘fundamental orientation to life, based on the capacity for critical thought and action, which goes far beyond the specific knowledge and skills-sets that are required to achieve the specific vocational goals of the job market’. In order to achieve this, the higher education sector should engage in ‘constructive partnerships with professional bodies and other stakeholders in professional programmes that are offered in higher education institutions’.

Many interviewees and commentators view integration as ‘partnerships’. For example, a public Further Education and Training college indicated that ‘the college offers various programmes in partnership with employers and other local and international partners’ (Annexure 1, p. 55). A public Higher Education institution supports this view in an in-service-training model (Annexure 1, p. 54):

...[A] model of in-service training...[a] business type partnership type approach...works very well and [in] the advisory bodies, you have people selected...senior people in the industry [who] regularly network [with] staff and review programmes...[W]e have practical work where they go out into industry and do practical work there and are also assessed on a practical level.

However, partnerships manifest in many forms. The CHE, for example, argues that (Annexure 4, p. 38), ‘[c]ollaboration between [Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)], employers and higher education institutions’ may be a more appropriate approach to the development of progression routes, than routes based purely on the structure of qualifications. A dichotomy between workplace-based and institution-based learning could thus undermine ‘the collaboration required between



workplace-based and institution-based modes of learning’ (COSATU, Annexure 4, p. 39). Therefore, in order to ensure that ‘practice components of professional and career-oriented qualifications can be performed in authentic contexts’, it seems important to ‘support investment by industry [to provide] placement opportunities for candidate graduates’. Partnerships, particularly in relation to experiential learning, which ‘forms part of HE programmes [should be] appropriately funded by Government’ (CTP, Annexure 4, p. 38). The NSA supports the notion of cross-sectoral funding and argues that ‘more structured mechanisms (including funding) to enable SETA ETQAs to partner with clusters of providers’ could incentivise the development of partnerships to take responsibility jointly for standards setting, quality assurance and learning programme delivery (Annexure 4, p. 38). Such partnership arrangements could, according to the NSA, ‘inform new funding arrangements’. In their view, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), ‘would be well-placed to develop networks of employers for workplace experience, internships, etc.’ (Annexure 4, p. 38).

Other partnerships and agreements are identified by the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), including agreements that will enhance cross-sectoral quality assurance, standards setting and qualifications design (Annexure 4, p. 39). These will involve partnerships with the Higher Education Quality Committee of the CHE, Sector Education and Training Authorities, for qualifications offered in workplaces, and with the Council for Quality Assurance of General and Further Education and Training, for qualifications offered in Further Education and Training colleges. Partnerships in quality assurance seem particularly important as workplace learning components of qualifications bring workplaces into the education and training ‘quality assurance spiral in a unique way’ (Education and Training Quality Assurance body, Annexure 4, p. 39).

The HPCSA sees collaborative approaches as a challenge to ‘the traditional notions of education, training and development in a way that seeks to break down the artificial barriers caused by inflexible and narrow focus’. In the health professions sector, it is thus necessary to develop the ‘linkages between a number of these structures to ensure a collaborative approach rather than an individualistic approach...required for an integrated development strategy’ (Annexure 4, p. 32). Vertical and horizontal

relationships should thus be dealt with jointly with the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority, to the extent that all qualifications that are registered with the HPCSA would encompass standards setting and quality assurance of qualifications in these overlapping sectors (Annexure 4, p. 4). This is seen to be a mechanism whereby articulation and access between the sectors are facilitated. Another Education and Training Quality Assurance body agrees, and notes that ‘internationally there have been moves to create co-operative projects that link schools, vocational education and universities and advanced study in the workplace’ (Annexure 4, p. 38). SAUVCA talks about ‘principled partnerships between different providers from different sites, contexts and learning domains’ to establish workable articulation mechanisms between partners (Annexure 4, p. 39). Such a partnership ‘holds as strongly for vertical progression from [Further Education and Training] to [Higher Education and Training] levels (i.e. from Level 4 to 5) as it does for horizontal or diagonal progression’ (Annexure 4, p. 39). ‘...[S]uch opportunities will have to be created on the basis of significant alignment between sectors, and partnerships between higher education, further education and the world of work’ (Annexure 4, p. 39). Therefore, ‘in order to expand access to HE study it further remains imperative that system blockages are removed...[T]he HE sector as providers needs to be able to access funding via [Sector Education and Training Authorities] and state subsidies’ (Annexure 4, p. 39). Thus,

[w]hile the [Higher Education] sector has the infrastructure and expertise to [enable articulation and access] through flexible delivery modes, the biggest challenge remains access to funding and the brokering of effective partnerships which will indeed make HE, FET and the world of work “inter-dependent”...[W]ithout this element, even a well-conceptualised NQF with an appropriate qualifications map [and] a well-organised bureaucratic system will not achieve the goals it was designed to effect.

### 7.3.3 *Conclusions – Integration as Curricular Integrability*

The data seem to suggest that it is at the level of curricular integration and the principled partnerships to enact the new relationships between education and training, (or learning and work components), that the greatest promise for integration emerges. It seems that these two components are seen increasingly to be complementary, particularly if they are conceptualised holistically as part of the curriculum. Both the quantitative and qualitative data evidenced strong support for the notion of curricular integration of theory and practice, even where changes in practice are still at the stage

of aspirations for the system. It seems that at all levels of the education and training system, from Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies through to classroom practitioners, the potential benefits of an appropriate mix of theory and practice are seen. In addition, partnerships and collaboration are seen to be important mechanisms to enact an integrated curriculum. These partnerships may take on many forms, such as in joint design of qualifications, curricula and learning programmes, in quality assurance and in the delivery of learning programmes.

However, a note of warning must be registered. The balance between the need to enhance employability and thus become more responsive to the needs of graduates, with the purposes of education, seems to be influenced by neo-liberal economic policies. These may tip the scale to focus narrowly on the market orientation of education and training, rather than on enhancing critical thinking, social development and citizenship.

Nevertheless, much support is evident for practices that worked well in the past, that is where relationships were built between institutions of learning and the professions. There seems to be the need to extend such relationships to qualifications, which did not traditionally offer a workplace practicum, as a prerequisite for the right to practise within a profession, and increasingly to include industry-based learning, or other forms of practical application of theory in authentic workplace situations.

Such practices seem to need structural relationships between partners in order to establish vertical and horizontal articulation routes and alignment between sectors, which could be incentivised by cross-sectoral funding arrangements. The absence of such structural relationships and funding arrangements are seen to be the major systemic blockage preventing integration, at this level, from taking place.

#### **7.4 Conclusions – The Complementarity of Education and Training**

The fourth Research Question, namely *Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?*, was investigated as this part of the inquiry. Unlike many of the previous lenses or perspectives on integration, this lens seems to hold the greatest promise for the realisation of the ideal of an integrated framework. This seems to stem from the

recognition that an integrated framework celebrates difference and diversity in accordance with the purposes and the role of qualifications on a continuum of a learning system. While some commentators insist that the epistemological characteristics of education and of training are incommensurable, this view was disconfirmed by many other comments in relation to the value that discipline-based learning and workplace practice could bring to each of the poles on the continuum of the learning system. Strong views were expressed that workplace-based qualifications cannot stand alone, as the delivery of such qualifications would lack thorough theoretical grounding, as well as the development of cognitive abilities and the broader social goals engendered by learning in discipline-based environments.

However, equally strong views were expressed that discipline-based qualifications need components as part of a holistic curriculum that will enhance employability and workplace skills. 'Pure' academic qualifications offered in public schools and universities were seen to be non-responsive to the needs of graduates in terms of their employability. However, warnings were sounded about an overt vocationalisation of education, in the sense that education becomes narrowly instrumental, ignoring the broader development of graduates.

Nevertheless, while education policies in South Africa may have been influenced by neo-liberal economic policies, the call for improved employability of graduates is most likely rooted in the realities of South African society. Part of these realities includes the notion that the entire system is geared towards entry to universities, possibly because the university sector holds the greatest esteem in the system. However, the other realities seem to include the view that many school-leavers (those who are able to meet the minimum requirements for entry to public higher education institutions), and graduates from universities are not employable. A balance between these opposing socio-political imperatives is seen to be attainable through the appropriate mix of theory and practice.

The general view seems to be that the best of both worlds, in appropriate ratios of disciplinary education and workplace practice, could enhance and support integration. Curricular integration is thus strongly supported. However, while much curricular integration in the past has evolved naturally through relationships between institutions

and professions, (and these relationships are held up as good examples of linked qualifications), there seems to be the need to facilitate many more of these relationships through structural arrangements, including cross-sectoral funding. Such relationships and collaboration are seen to have the potential in enhancing qualification and curriculum design, quality assurance, delivery of programmes, articulation and progression routes, and access.

It seems to be possible, therefore, to infer that an integrated framework could have a substantial influence on the change in the relationship between education and training. An integrated framework could, if structural arrangements are facilitated, thus enhance the complementarity between education and training by recognising that the distinct purposes of the two opposite poles of the system are not in opposition, but could, in fact, strengthen the system.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**  
**THE FUTURE OF INTEGRATION:**  
**THEORY, POLICY AND RESEARCH**

*...many societies don't get things right the first time. So, they try something, and they mess it up, and they mess it up in the implementation, and then they try something else, and then they come back, and so, you see very often this policy churn<sup>1</sup>*

*The final chapter reflects on the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) as an integrated framework, particularly in relation to the main research question To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework? In doing so, it evaluates the research questions, the methodology and the conceptual framework for the study. It also presents the key findings of the inquiry. The Research Questions and the results for each question, in relation to the particular perspective of an integrated framework, are summarised in 8.2. Section 8.3 discusses methodological issues, including the research instruments and the limitations to the study. The key findings are presented in 8.4. The question asked in 8.5, namely 'Is integration an unattainable ideal?', represents the central point of departure of the inquiry. The conceptual framework for the study and consequently the particular perspective of the study is discussed in 8.6. Further research, to investigate additional puzzles in the development and implementation of an integrated framework, is discussed in 8.7. The chapter concludes (8.8) with some reflections on my journey through the study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority

## 8.1 Introduction

South Africa is one of many countries that have decided to implement a national qualifications framework as a key instrument of reform of education and training systems. As such, the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) is considered one of the 'first generation' NQFs. Many countries that are implementing so-called second and third generation frameworks visit and invite the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to visit them in order to learn from the South African example, particularly countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, the South African example is perhaps the only one that links the reform of its education and training system to social justice, redress and the transformation of its larger society.

The national qualifications framework movement is a young one – the oldest NQF, the Scottish example, is barely twenty years old. Internationally, twenty years is not considered a long period in relation to the time that it takes from the implementation of radical reforms to the point where major changes in practice become evident. South Africa's NQF is barely nine years old and, if one considers that at least the first two to three years were spent on developing regulations and setting up new bureaucratic structures to take responsibility for standards and qualifications development and quality assurance, then the implementation of the SANQF has a very short history indeed. Nevertheless, within this short period, the SANQF has been subject to a formal review (2001/2002), formal proposals for changes in the system (2003), as well as a number of informal proposals that have not yet been made available to the public. In addition, a host of other discussion documents, for example the draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework (Ministry of Education, 2004), seem to take the original integrated design of the SANQF in other directions.

This period has thus been marked by policy instability, policy uncertainty, policy unpredictability, and the misalignment of policies that were meant to cover the Human Resource Development strategy and the National Skills Development Strategies. In effect, this period has been characterised by policy churn, with some critics suggesting that the SANQF was an expensive experiment that should be abandoned, and others vehemently supporting the original intentions and rationale of the framework. Yet critics and supporters alike seem to support an integrated system

in some form or another, even if the principle of integration is only espoused, and still considered very much to be at a conceptual level. This inquiry started off with the premise that there is much conceptual confusion of the principle of integration. The puzzle was that if there seems to be so much support from both critics and supporters for this first objective of the SANQF, why is there so little evidence of its implementation? The different perspectives or lenses of an integrated framework emerged from this question, which in turn led to the development of the conceptual framework for the study.

## 8.2 Summary of the Research Questions and Results

While the different perspectives of an integrated framework greatly assisted in sorting out the conceptual muddle surrounding integration, it became evident that these perspectives overlap. The Research Questions assisted in grouping the perspectives coherently, but it was clear that respondents, interviewees and commentators often grouped two or more perspectives together. Nevertheless, the Research Questions, linked with the seven perspectives identified in the Conceptual Framework, increasingly aided in pinpointing the different understandings, uses of and implications of an integrated framework.

The main research question, namely *To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework?* was supported by four additional research questions that attempted to understand an integrated framework from the different perspectives developed in the Conceptual Framework:

- i) Is the objective of an integrated South African National Qualifications Framework an example of policy symbolism?
- ii) Can the relationships between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework be made meaningful through an integrated framework?
- iii) Can the development of communities of practice as a key element of an integrated framework, enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?
- iv) Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?



The relationship between each of the questions, and the perspectives of an integrated framework was shown in each of the findings' chapters.

*8.2.1 Is the Objective of an Integrated South African National Qualifications Framework an Example of Policy Symbolism?*

The first supporting research question viewed integration from a macro and conceptual perspective (refer to Chapter 5). Firstly, the macro perspective deals with the political intent, influenced by a particular historical and political moment and the ideology that underlies the formulation of policy of a new government.

The data strongly reflected the political and ideological rationale for the implementation of an education and training policy that was meant to address social justice issues. Resistance to an unjust regime, which classified a large part of the population as 'second-class citizens', social inclusion and subsequently the involvement of the intended beneficiaries of a system through the notion of the SANQF as a social construct, emerge as major themes in the discussion of integration as policy symbolism.

As a result, social justice issues particular to the South African context seem to have been conflated with historical prejudices against vocationally and occupationally oriented learning, although this is a characteristic of most education and training systems, and not only of the South African system.

Secondly, this research question dealt with the education and training system in the abstract, at a theoretical level, against the background of social justice and the underlying ideology that drove the new government. An integrated framework was meant to accord equal esteem, in contrast with the elitism and social strata silos that characterised the previous system under apartheid. Integration therefore seems to reflect a value of a new democratic society, as opposed to an authoritarian society, and was possibly strongly influenced by a socialist, egalitarian rationale. The notion of 'equal esteem' is a theme that recurs throughout the study and seems to be, in part, an attempt to recognise those individuals who have contributed to the struggle for freedom, and to enhance the life opportunities of such individuals..

The recognition that ‘ordinary people’, as opposed to the elite, have value, is reflected to some extent in the concept of the SANQF as a social construct. This seems to mean that civil society is empowered to participate, as a partner, in the formulation and construction of an education and training system; something that in the past, was structured to entrench social strata and the concomitant privilege and prestige associated with the upper levels of those strata. The idea of an integrated SANQF is thus far more than a mere ‘classification system’ of qualifications and learning programmes – it is vested with the responsibility to effect broader social transformation.

The ideology resulting from a particularly disparate political system, therefore, became the guiding philosophy for the construction of the new education and training system. In the objectives and underpinning principles, integration emerges as a meta-theme for the framework, particularly in the ways in which the new system is meant to enhance portability, progression and articulation between different components of the system. These ‘technical’ aspects of an integrated framework are thus strongly linked to the social purposes of the SANQF, namely to transform a system built on deliberate neglect, and thereby to value all learning, to achieve parity of esteem, and to enhance the freedom to move between components of the system. Whereas most national qualifications frameworks attempt to achieve greater coherence, in addition the SANQF was meant to reduce social inequalities; to award social esteem to all learning, particularly learning associated with workplace training; and, through establishing national standards for national qualifications, was also meant to reduce the differences between institutions of learning and between the advantaged and disadvantaged.

The current political impasse and the seemingly different agendas of the Departments of Education and of Labour is, therefore, seen to be a major stumbling block in the achievement of the social, transformative purposes of an integrated framework.

However, the risks of infusing an education and training system, and particularly an integrated system, with the aspirations for a transformed society are great. On the one hand, the almost blind commitment to the ideology underpinning an integrated framework may mask the real structural and epistemological difficulties that have

very little to do with ideology. On the other hand, such commitment to an ideology seems to insulate the framework, as a pragmatic construct, against criticism, to the extent that critics are branded as ‘stone-age resisters’ with ‘racial or ideological motives’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 90). Finally, the lack of progress in the achievement of these aspirations may lead to disillusionment on the part of the intended beneficiaries of the system and, consequently, disengagement from the process.

In conclusion, the answer to the question, ‘Is the objective of an integrated South African National Qualifications Framework an example of policy symbolism?’, is therefore, ‘Undoubtedly so’. Further, this symbol of the break from a past disparate and unjust system has made it inconceivable to implement the framework incrementally, as so many other frameworks have been, because the system under apartheid was completely discredited. In addition, the symbolism vested in an equitable education and training system has profoundly influenced the guiding philosophy underpinning the construction of the framework.

#### *8.2.2 Can the Relationship between Levels, Sectors and Types of Qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework be made Meaningful through an Integrated Framework?*

The second and third research questions viewed integration at a meso level, that is where increasingly there is a move away from the symbolic and conceptual level, to a level where an integrated framework is operationalised and ‘made practical’ (refer to Chapter 6). The second question dealt with the intrinsic logic of an integrated framework, namely with the structure of the framework and the design of qualifications that intend to describe and define the structural relationships between different levels, sectors and types of qualifications in order to establish learning pathways throughout the system. The design of the framework aims to establish progression and articulation routes and the portability of credits attained in different contexts of the framework. For this reason, the SANQF was conceptualised as a comprehensive framework, with the intention to broaden the reach of the framework and, consequently, make the whole system available to learners. This is unlike most other national qualifications frameworks, where these may cover only one particular sector, for example, the vocational sector, or the university sector. Even the Scottish system, which is considered a ‘unified’ system, consists of sub-frameworks or

‘frameworks within frameworks’. An important implication of the comprehensiveness of the South African framework is that it is much more difficult to establish meaningful links between the sectors included on the framework. These difficulties became evident from the data. The structure of the framework and the design of qualifications, that is the intrinsic logic of the framework, is not a sufficient measure to establish structural relationships. Whereas common levels, standards and common criteria for the inclusion of qualifications on the framework were considered to be mechanisms to enhance equivalence between such qualifications, it is evident that there are important constraints.

The first includes the lack of parity of esteem between institutions of learning. While the quantitative data indicated that respondents believed that qualifications are of equal value and that it is possible to transfer credits between different institutions and contexts, this was largely disconfirmed by the interviews. Neither the qualifications offered at different public institutions, nor the qualifications offered at public and private institutions were considered equally valuable. The quantitative data, therefore, seemed to reflect the aspirations for the system, rather than actual practice.

Further, the degree of prescriptiveness for the inclusion of qualifications on the SANQF, that is the architecture of qualifications, did not result in sufficient commonalities for such qualifications to be considered equivalent, particularly between the two main types of qualifications – unit-standards based and non-unit-standards based qualifications. It also became evident that to achieve any kind of meaningful relationship between different types of qualification and different contexts, a much more deliberate approach is needed, where stakeholders representing the different sectors engage in joint planning, qualifications design and quality assurance, which seems to take the intrinsic logic of the framework into the realm of institutional logic. Where such deliberate efforts were undertaken in sub-sectors of the framework, it became evident that learning and career paths were improved. Such a holistic view of the qualifications of the sub-sector was made possible by the development of credit matrices or qualification maps for the sub-sector. It therefore seems likely that learners within a particular sub-sector would increasingly be able to transfer credits, and embark on learning and career paths within that sector. However, this is not necessarily true for cross-sectoral pathways.

Therefore, in answer to the question, ‘Can the relationship between levels, sectors and types of qualifications on the South African National Qualifications Framework be made meaningful through an integrated framework?’, the data indicates that this has not happened to any great degree, except in structural relationships within particular sub-sectors. This may mean that the South African system is seeing the emergence of a number of sub-frameworks that are linked, rather than integrated with other sub-sectors. The scope of the framework and the comprehensiveness of the South African framework, in particular, are not currently seen to enhance the establishment of an integrated framework. It seems that the greater the scope, the more difficult it is to establish structural relationships across all sectors of the education and training system. Structural relationships seem to require changes in the institutional logic of an integrated framework, which was addressed in the third research question.

### *8.2.3 Can the Development of Communities of Practice Enhance Trust amongst Partners in Education and Training?*

The third research question (Chapter 6) is closely associated with the second question, and thus also dealt with the meso level perspective of an integrated framework. This question investigated the institutional logic of an integrated framework, that is the policy breadth of the system. Policy breadth refers, in the first place, to the congruence of legislation, regulation and sector and institutional policies of institutions that find themselves under the ambit of the Human Resource Development strategy (largely the responsibility of the Department of Education) and the National Skills Development Strategy (the responsibility of the Department of Labour) and, in the second place, to agreed overall plans for the system supported and endorsed by these two departments. However, this ‘divided ownership’ of the overall human resource and skills development strategies was seen as an important constraint for the development of communities of practice and trust, particularly because the perception seems to be that the two heads of these ministries have had inter-personal problems and, consequently, that their differences are about ‘fighting for turf’, rather than being based on principled differences.

Further, the development of communities of practice and trust should be seen against the background of widespread ‘mistrust’ in the previous system, where even good practice in the previous system was discredited. Again, it is evident that the main

proponents of an integrated framework felt that they could not consider an incremental approach, where the system could build on existing practice rather than start from scratch. Thus, in the design of the framework, there was an attempt to build new communities of practice, through the development of qualifications through standards generation bodies representative of the main stakeholder groups. Such bodies do not necessarily include expert qualification and curriculum designers. Also, communities of practice and trust were seen to be vested in the new quality assurance bodies, which are meant to give the assurance that, through their quality assurance processes, the emerging results can be trusted. While there is evidence that in some sub-sectors the quality assurance system is engendering trust amongst institutions within that sector, it also became evident that this kind of trust is not yet emerging cross-sectorally. One of the reasons seems to be that quality assurance bodies have different foci in their quality assurance processes and, consequently, other quality assurance bodies do not consider such processes valid and, therefore, not trustworthy. Further, it seems that quality assurance per se cannot prevent the competition for students and for financial gain amongst institutions.

Where communities of practice and trust are emerging, these appear out of the need of a sub-sector, for example, between institutions of higher learning and professional bodies. It is also important to note that most of these communities of practice are communities that existed before the implementation of the SANQF. This is acknowledged, and is held up as an example of how new communities of practice could be developed. Proposals for more enabling regulation, which would enable partners to form on-the-ground networks, based on shared understandings and the need to cooperate, are made, particularly in relation to cross-departmental planning and funding.

Nevertheless, it became evident, firstly, that the notion of communities of practice is still in the realm of the intrinsic logic of the framework. In other words, communities of practice and trust currently still hinge on the design of the framework. Secondly, the major constraint to develop other communities of practice and trust is the lack of congruence in aims, legislation, regulation and policies between the two political heads of the education and training system. Finally, it seems that the intrinsic logic of

the framework has little to do with the development of on-the-ground networks, which could possibly evolve into new communities of practice and trust.

The research question, ‘Can the development of communities of practice enhance trust amongst partners in education and training?’ evidenced that trust is developing within sub-sectors of the education and training system. However, the lack of congruence between the legislation, regulation and policies of the political heads of the system seems to be constraining the development of new communities of practice within and across sectors. In fact, it seems that rather than facilitate the development of new communities of practice, new barriers are emerging. This seems to stem from, for example, the different foci and approaches of quality assurance bodies in relation to the qualifications within their ambits of responsibility. Also, the necessary institutional logic, which may influence the way in which new communities of practice and trust are formed, is not currently enabled. Such new partners need to undertake deliberate work to build shared understandings and agreements progressively, which may lead to meaningful progression and articulation routes within and across sectors, but the incentives to undertake the work, such as joint planning and cross-departmental funding, are not yet possible.

#### *8.2.4 Can an Integrated Framework Enhance the Complementarity of Discipline-based and Workplace-based Learning?*

The fourth and final supporting research question viewed integration from a micro perspective, that is at the level of implementation in the development of curricula and learning programmes. This question investigated integration as the continuum of learning, and the curricular integration that emanates from an understanding of such a continuum (refer to Chapter 7).

As in all of the previous sections, in this part of the inquiry it also became evident that the socio-political background to the development and implementation of an integrated framework tends to mask the real practical difficulties in attaining the integration of education and training. This is reflected in the discussion on the equivalence of qualifications on the framework as opposed to the recognition and valuing of difference and diversity. The socio-political imperatives underlying the reform of the system seem to have led to an epistemological conflation of education

and training, possibly rooted in the restrictive practices of the system under apartheid. The result is that where commentators argue for recognised epistemological differences, such commentators are considered ‘recalcitrant’, ‘stone-age resisters’. However, a number of commentators call for the ‘equal status’ of qualifications through socially acceptable comparabilities, which could result in parity of esteem between education and training. However, they argue against attempting to attain epistemological equivalence. In part, the argument of the hierarchical relationships between abstract learning and everyday knowledge is real and valid, but the practical difficulties of offering abstract, conceptual learning in workplaces also play an important role.

Nevertheless, increasingly there is recognition and celebration of difference and diversity. This seems to be reflected in the acknowledgment that education and training are both part of a continuum of learning, and that the continuum represents the place, purpose and role of qualifications within the system. The purpose of the qualification is thus the basis for parity of esteem. However, epistemologically, qualifications along the continuum are not seen to be equivalent.

The value of qualifications in relation to their purpose in the system is evident in the recognition that education and training could increasingly become complementary, particularly if education and training are not caricatured as ‘mental’ and ‘manual’. In addition, many respondents and commentators noted that there is an increasing trend, internationally, of combining economically useful learning appropriate to a workplace with abstract, theoretical learning and the achievement of broader social goals such as citizenship.

However, the recognition of diversity and difference seems to require a description of the most appropriate combinations of theory and practice as part of a holistic curriculum, which will straddle discipline-based learning in institutions and authentic practice in the workplace. This seems to suggest that there is an acknowledgement that the principle of integration is changing the relationship between education and training, and which may result in a ‘new’ epistemology where different types of learning, for example, applied and theoretical, are viewed as complementary and not opposing components of the system. In this regard, both the quantitative responses



and the qualitative interviews evidenced strong support for appropriate combinations of theory and practice. In addition, there is recognition that a balance should be struck between the seemingly increasing vocationalisation and marketisation of education and broader social transformation goals.

Further, the recognition of diversity and difference seems to require a much more deliberate approach to planning for progression and articulation routes. This is seen to be facilitated by structural relationships, partnerships and collaboration on qualification design, quality assurance and programme delivery, as well as a much greater alignment between sectors to achieve their common goals. An important systemic blockage that seems to be preventing such principled partnerships is the inability of institutions of learning under the ambit of the Department of Education to access funding from the Department of Labour, which has an interest in linking qualifications in order to achieve the skills development objectives.

In conclusion, in answer to the question, ‘Can an integrated framework enhance the complementarity of discipline-based and workplace-based learning?’, the data seems to suggest that this is indeed the case. Integration viewed as a continuum of learning, supported by the development of appropriate holistic curricula, which includes theory and practice in appropriate combinations along the continuum, learning programmes and delivery methodologies, seems to hold the greatest promise for the achievement of an integrated framework. One of the main reasons seems to be that those who deal with the enactment of curricula, at the coalface of education and training delivery, see the benefits for enhanced quality of education and training in keeping with the needs of a modern system.

### **8.3 Methodological Reflections**

This inquiry was based on data collected for three different purposes. The first was for the National Qualifications Framework Impact Study, Cycle 1 (pilot study) and Cycle 2 (baseline study), which included qualitative and quantitative data. The second dataset emanated from public responses to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document*, jointly published by the Department of Education and the Department of Labour (2003) as a response to the review of the SANQF undertaken in 2001 and published as the *Report of Study Team*

*on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework* (2002). The third dataset consisted of six unstructured interviews with members of the South African Qualifications Authority undertaken in May and July 2006.

Except for the last dataset, data collection for the first two datasets did not purpose to investigate an integrated framework per se. The NQF Impact Study has a much broader purpose, and included, in the first two cycles, data collection across four organising sets, which include 17 Impact Indicators (refer to Chapter 4):

- The extent to which qualifications address the education and training needs of learners and South African society
- The extent to which the delivery of learning programmes address the education and training needs of learners and the South African society
- The extent to which quality assurance arrangements enhance the effectiveness of education and training
- The extent to which the NQF has had a wider social, economic and political impact in building a lifelong learning culture.

Further, the NQF Impact Study did not attempt to investigate the fine grain of practice, but to determine *indications* of impact. While a number of Impact Indicators thus addressed ‘integration’ and its associated principles such as ‘portability’, ‘progression’, ‘articulation’, and so forth, the responses were of necessity quite brief. Nevertheless, the fact that both Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 contained questions about integration in general made it possible to extract a substantial dataset. However, owing to the sampling approach for Cycle 2, namely purposive quota sampling, it was not always possible to ensure that the most knowledgeable person in the organisation sampled (university, college, workplace, employer) would complete the questionnaire, undergo the supporting interviews, or participate in the focus groups. The learner focus groups in particular produced very little usable data. In terms of the quantitative data, it was a matter of concern for the Research Team responsible for the NQF Impact Study that so many responses tended towards the median ‘Agree’. This is a methodological concern that will have to be considered for the future cycles of the NQF Impact Study. However, it may also suggest that there is overwhelming support for the principle of an integrated framework. Nevertheless, while some sets of

responses indicated some difference across categories of respondents, in general the overall responses and the category-specific responses were almost identical and not always congruent with the qualitative responses in the interviews.

The second dataset, based on public responses to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document*, was therefore particularly useful. The selection of responses utilised for this inquiry included responses from Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies across different sectors, including Higher Education and General and Further Education, as well as Sector Education and Training Authorities, organised labour organisations, professional bodies, umbrella bodies such as the CTP and the SAUVCA (now merged into Higher Education South Africa) private higher education institutions, the National Skills Authority, and a political party. This dataset produced particularly rich and detailed commentaries on an integrated framework. The strength of this dataset stems from the fact that highly knowledgeable persons, representing their particular sector responses, compiled the public comment. In addition, these comments were largely unsolicited and unguided by interview schedules or questionnaire statements. The use of this dataset also afforded the opportunity to engage with the debates raging about the SANQF, something that the Research Team for the Impact Study deliberately avoided and, thus, this dataset added a particularly rich dimension to the data utilised for this inquiry.

The final dataset, the unstructured interviews with six members of the South African Qualifications Authority, was undertaken for two reasons, namely to confirm the currency of the views expressed by the respondents and interviewees for Cycle 1 (2003/2004) and 2 (2004/2005) of the NQF Impact Study, and to gauge the perceptions of the members of the Authority, since these are likely to influence the direction of the education and training system substantially, in particular in relation to an integrated framework. The responses of these members were largely congruent with the data collected for the two cycles of the NQF Impact Study, which suggests strongly, as noted in both reports of the NQF Impact Study, that integration is still largely at a conceptual level.

### 8.3.1 *Research Instruments*

Except for the last dataset, the research instruments used for Cycle 1 and 2 were not, as noted earlier, primarily focused on an integrated framework (Annexure 6). Nevertheless, the qualitative research instruments for Cycle 1 were largely appropriate and useful. However, the quantitative instrument for Cycle 2 raised concerns owing to the large number of median responses. The six-point scale, ‘Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, Don’t know, Too soon to say’, may need to be revisited for a finer differentiation in responses<sup>2</sup>. In addition, of necessity, the supporting interviews focused on responses where respondents strongly disagreed or strongly agreed, and thus did not produce detailed qualitative responses, which may have explained the differences between the quantitative data and the qualitative responses.

The unstructured interview with six members of the South African Qualifications Authority was based on a single question, namely ‘What do you understand by integration’ or ‘What does an integrated framework mean to you?’ Deeper probes, namely, ‘What are the implications if we do not achieve an integrated framework?’, were used for two of the respondents, but for the remaining four this seemed unnecessary. This instrument was thus useful and appropriate for the target respondents.

### 8.3.2 *Limitations*

The most important limitation to this study is closely associated with one of the key findings of the study, namely that an integrated framework is still largely an aspiration for the system, rather than practice. The SANQF has had a very short history. In the nine years of its existence much has been achieved, but an integrated framework has not yet been operationalised in a substantial way. Successful approaches are limited, and even in those pockets where integration seems to have been implemented, the success or failure of such approaches will only become evident once a cohort of learners has been able to navigate their way through the system.

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<sup>2</sup> A recommendation that will be made to the Research Team for Cycle 3 of the NQF Impact Study, which will be initiated by the end of 2006.

The second limitation stems from the fact that, except for the final dataset, the other datasets were intermingled with other issues dealing with the system on a much broader level. A single set of research instruments would have facilitated comparability across sectors and respondents.

The third limitation is also closely related to one of the key findings. It was extraordinarily difficult to separate ideology from pragmatic decisions about the SANQF. Much deliberation was thus needed in order to isolate and separate the socio-political ideals from possible emerging practice.

## **8.4 Key Findings**

### *8.4.1 Key Finding 1: Socio-Political Aspirations*

The socio-political aspirations, reflected in the notion that an integrated framework is a powerful symbol of the break from a past disparate system, have profoundly influenced the underpinning ideology for the system. While it is acknowledged that symbolism is important, particularly in South Africa, the blind commitment to an integrated framework seems to mask real and important difficulties in achieving an integrated framework. Likewise, the ideology, as the guiding philosophy of the system, seems to insulate an integrated framework against criticism, with critics branded as resisters. The risks of infusing an education and training system with the aspirations of a transforming society are great. Where such aspirations are not seen to be realised, key intended beneficiaries may become disillusioned and feel betrayed, resulting in disengagement with the collaboration required to achieve their ideals for the system.

### *8.4.2 Key Finding 2: Integration in the Abstract*

Related to the previous finding, it is evident that integration is still largely at a conceptual level. No substantial attempts have been made by the political heads of the system to analyse and operationalise the meanings of integration at a systemic level. In this regard, the conceptual framework for this study has greatly assisted in sorting through the muddle of the meanings and uses of integration. If it is understood that an integrated framework, as a meta-theme for the system, purposes to enhance meaningful progression, articulation and credit transfer, then the operationalisation of these concepts may become more tangible.

#### *8.4.3 Key Finding 3: The Esteem of Vocational Education*

The ideology underpinning a new and equitable system seems to be ignoring the fact that vocational education, internationally, is struggling to achieve parity of esteem with the traditional, prestigious, academic stream of education. This is reflected in the drive for parity of esteem of qualifications attained in the different sectors of education, by placing them at the same level of the SANQF. This is perhaps not surprising in the South African context, given the disparate system of the past, with academic education associated with white privilege and vocational and occupationally-based education associated with black suppression, but the equivalence of qualifications should not be confused with equal esteem for qualifications, regardless of where they were achieved. Equal esteem for learning may be a reasonable assumption, but equivalence between qualifications may be an unattainable ideal.

#### *8.4.4 Key Finding 4: Social Inclusion*

The stakeholder principle espoused by the SANQF is strongly supported by respondents, interviewees and commentators alike. However, this principle is also strongly criticised, possibly because it is seen to alienate experts, who traditionally were responsible for qualification and standards design and curriculum development. Nevertheless, this approach to qualifications and standards design, and quality assurance has gone a long way in reassuring civil society that its voice is heard in an environment where, in the past, decisions were made on behalf of the greater part of the population. This is an important achievement for the SANQF, and the buy-in that was attained as a result of this approach should, if possible, be maintained, albeit in a different form. While this finding does not address an integrated framework directly, it seems important to retain the support and endorsement of civil society for its involvement and ownership of the system.

#### *8.4.5 Key Finding 5: The Intrinsic Logic of the Framework*

The design features of an integrated framework are important and helpful in outlining the progression and articulation routes for learners who are attempting to develop a learning and career path. However, the comprehensiveness of a framework can inhibit, rather than aid integration. An all-encompassing framework seems to require much more detailed descriptions of progression and articulation routes across the

system. Given that a comprehensive framework includes all levels and types of qualifications, the intrinsic logic of the framework seems unlikely to achieve the relationships needed to enhance progression and articulation routes on its own. The design of the framework could enhance progression and articulation through other measures such as credit matrices and qualification map, but, even so, will still need the institutional logic to support the broad design.

#### *8.4.6 Key Finding 6: The Institutional Logic of the Framework*

The institutional logic of an integrated framework hinges on the extent to which the institutions are enabled to develop relationships with other sectors in the education and training system. However, this kind of policy breadth currently does not seem to exist. There seems to be limited congruence in the legislation, regulation and policies of the two Departments responsible for the implementation of the SANQF. The divided ownership of the SANQF is considered a serious constraint for the development of principled partnerships that may straddle education and training.

#### *8.4.7 Key Finding 7: Articulation between Qualifications*

The difference between the two main types of qualifications on the framework cannot be reduced by stating that the debate over unit-standards based and non-unit-standards based qualifications should be put to rest (DoE & DoL, 2003). It became evident that articulation between these two types of qualification is difficult. An alternative approach to articulation should be investigated, possibly by making use of a unitised, modular approach, which could, in the case of unit-standard based qualifications, include a number of unit standards in a composite unit of learning, while non-unit-standards based qualifications could arrange the learning in modules. The Scottish system has been successful in utilising units of learning and modules, which seem to enable credit transfer across different types of qualifications (Hart, 2005).

#### *8.4.8 Key Finding 8: The Emergence of Sub-frameworks*

The strongest evidence of the implementation of an integrated framework occurred in sub-frameworks of the system, for example, in the engineering sector and health professions sector as examples of the development of 'new' communities of practice. This is an important and significant finding. Integration evolved naturally as a result of the need of the sub-sector. Within the sector it is, therefore, possible to develop

qualification maps and matrices that are useful and meaningful to the sector. This suggests that an integrated framework may increasingly move towards a linked system. It also seems to suggest that to achieve the ideal of an integrated framework, it may not be useful to create the impression that integration can be achieved by political fiat. Integration will occur where it is necessary and useful.

#### *8.4.9 Key Finding 9: Communities of Practice*

It became evident that the distrust between the education and training sectors is still quite widespread. This is partly due to the distrust of the previous system, but it also became evident that new unintended barriers are emerging, particularly in relation to the differences in the approach to quality assurance, which seem to cast doubt on the trustworthiness of the quality of qualifications subject to different quality assurance regimes. As in the case of the previous finding, communities of practice and, consequently, the trust formed between partners within such communities, evolve out of the need of a particular community. Again, as in the previous finding, trust cannot be regulated. However, enabling regulation, particularly in relation to agreed quality assurance approaches, could enhance the development of communities of practice. Problems with the differences in quality assurance regimes are well documented (SAQA, 2005).

#### *8.4.10 Key Finding 10: A Continuum of Learning and Curricular Integration*

The continuum of learning and curricular integration, that is the integration of theory and practice in qualifications, curricula and learning programmes, produced the strongest evidence of integration. A continuum of learning, whereby the purposes, place and objectives of a particular qualification are valued, is well accepted and supported. Increasingly, education and training institutions seem to be recognising that difference and diversity in terms of qualifications do not necessarily equate to 'better or worse'. Rather, there is an acknowledgement that, in a modern education and training system, most qualifications tend to converge towards the middle of the continuum of learning and that it is valuable to include, in holistic curricula, economically useful learning, authentic workplace practice, as well as solid theoretical groundings to such practice. The complementarity of discipline-based learning and workplace-based practice, in this context is thus strongly supported.



#### *8.4.11 Key Finding 11: Principled Partnerships*

The positive finding under Key Finding 10 is tempered by the constraints experienced by education and training institutions in developing principled partnerships. As in the case of many of the previous findings, the development of principled partnerships, which may facilitate cross-sectoral planning of progression and articulation routes, qualification mapping and curriculum design in order to achieve curricular integration, is still at the level of aspiration for the system. The systemic blockage is perceived to be the inability of institutions, which fall under the ambit of the Department of Education (for example, public universities, universities of technology and further education and training colleges), to access funding from the National Skills Fund administered by the Department of Labour. As before, the divided ownership of the system is seen to be problematic.

### **8.5 An Integrated Framework: An Unattainable Ideal?**

If the goals of an integrated, high quality education and training system that will facilitate access, mobility and progression for the individuals in the system in order to achieve their full personal development, no longer hold, then we should develop new objectives. If however, these are still true, then we have to find ways in which to make this possible (Blom, 2006c, p. 16).

The main research question asks, ‘To what extent does the South African education and training system reflect in principle, perception and practice, the ideal of an integrated framework?’ The data suggest that the principle of an integrated framework is strongly espoused in its symbolic importance to the system. Likewise, in the defence of an integrated framework against the proposed changes to the framework, it is clear from the data that many respondents cherish the notion of integration but that, in practice, the ideal of an integrated framework is far from being realised. It is evident from the data that many people blame the lack of integration on political indecision, the different agendas and the lack of strategic direction of the two departments politically responsible for the implementation of an integrated framework. While lack of political will certainly seems to impact on the system at a macro level, the data also suggest that there are many structural difficulties associated with a comprehensive and unified framework. A comprehensive framework requires much more deliberate work to align the sub-sectors of the system. The structure of the framework and the design of qualifications, common standards and agreed quality assurance systems do not necessarily facilitate integration on its own. Further,

opposing epistemologies that are characteristic of discipline-based and workplace-based learning still remain a major constraint. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the greatest promise for the achievement of the ideal of an integrated framework seems to be located in the integration of theoretical and applied learning and in the principled partnerships needed to enact integrated curricula. However, even at this micro level, integration is seriously constrained by difficulties experienced at the meso and macro levels of the system. This may mean that an integrated framework can only be built from the ‘bottom up’, that is, where it is meaningful within a particular context – often within a particular sub-sector of the system. This may also mean that rather than more regulation, less regulation is needed that will remove unintended barriers created by the many structures of the system responsible for standards and qualification development and quality assurance, each with their own legislative mandates and reporting requirements. This may enable the development of relationships where there is a need, including cross-sectoral relationships which may require cross-sectoral funding. The data strongly suggest that this is where integration is already occurring naturally.

In conclusion, firstly, the importance of the symbolism of an integrated framework should not be underestimated. On the one hand, the deeply felt passion for a transformed education and training system and by implication, a transformed society, seems to have remained a strong motivator for continued support of an integrated system. On the other hand, it is evident that a strongly espoused ideology may mask real practical problems in achieving an integrated framework and seems to insulate the principle against critique.

Secondly, the SANQF cannot be seen, to any great extent, as an integrated framework. It is evident that stating that the framework is ‘integrated’ does not make it so. Integration cannot be achieved by political fiat. The intrinsic logic of an integrated framework only seems to be meaningful if the institutional logic of an integrated framework, and a credible theory of action to enable integration, is taken very seriously. Integration, seems at a systemic level, can only be realised where account is taken of the resources required, where the constraints and impediments are considered and where realistic, incremental milestones are determined.

In the third place, it is evident that an integrated framework, despite its intentions, does not improve parity of esteem. There is no parity between education and training qualifications, between institutions (public/public and public/private) and consequently, there is also no parity between the holders of qualifications attained in different contexts and at different sites of learning. Parity may ultimately only be achieved when the quality of learning programmes and programme delivery are improved. Related to the previous point, portability of learning seems only possible where articulation routes are deliberately planned for and clearly described. The vision of seamless mobility of learners who are attempting to make their way through the system may only be realised through deliberate articulation bridges within and between sub-sectors of the education and training system. Again, this may only be enabled through improved quality of learning within those sub-sectors.

In the fourth place, trust, and consequently, the communities of practice necessary for building articulation routes, cannot be enforced by regulation. This is evident from the lack of trust in the quality of qualifications and a questioning of the rigour of quality assurance regimes utilised in different sectors of the education and training system despite the claim that all education and training providers are subject to the same quality criteria. Trust seems to be engendered through joint planning, meaningful partnerships and joint responsibility for the quality of the system.

Finally, the greatest promise for real change in the education and training system, and therefore in achieving an integrated system, seems to be in the acknowledgement that education and training epistemologies are not incommensurable, but could increasingly become complementary. From a policy point of view, it may ultimately be more meaningful to focus on how the global trend of education and training convergence could be enabled. Thus, policy development in relation to an integrated framework needs to find the right balance between the regulatory purposes, namely the ‘tight’ features of a qualifications framework, and the ‘looser’ communication purposes that will enable the development of appropriate fit for purpose approaches within particular contexts. Crucially, policy directions should enable the development of communities of practice, and this seems only possible through an enabling, rather than regulatory structure.

### **8.6 The Conceptual Framework for the Study**

The concept of an integrated framework has, in South Africa, become infused with socio-political aspirations for a transformed society. This is unlike other countries where unified frameworks are being implemented and where these are seen as a technical requirement to make the system easier to understand. The different perspectives on integration developed in the conceptual framework for this study thus assisted in clarifying the integrative intentions of qualifications frameworks in general and the SANQF specifically. The seven lenses on integration were useful in facilitating an improved understanding of integration in the South African context and assisted in separating ideology from structure while retaining the guiding philosophy of the framework. Through the data it became evident that it is difficult to develop a comprehensive, integrated framework, not because of resistance to the ideology underpinning the framework, as the ideology is one of the most enduring features of the new system, but because of a poor understanding of the technical mechanisms needed to implement such a system. While the first two lenses, symbolism and a guiding philosophy, therefore provided a perspective on the social justice issues that sit behind the rationale for an integrated framework, the remaining lenses provided the socio-technical prerequisites for successful implementation. The data strongly support this view. In the investigation into the scope, architecture and the policy breadth of the SANQF, the most prominent problems experienced were related to structure, design and lack of congruence of planning and regulation. Also, it became evident that structure and design can assist, but do not ensure implementation. Implementation is enhanced through joint strategic alignment of the system in the recognition of the kinds of interventions that will have to be undertaken in order for the composite parts of the system to articulate. Currently, it is clear that education and training are still completely separate, and that the two systems have had different development trajectories. Further, these different trajectories, with their concomitant structures, foci and regimes, seem to be constraining the development of communities of practice that could embody the two final lenses of the conceptual framework, namely a continuum of learning and the integrated curricula that give meaning to such a continuum. The conceptual framework for the study greatly assisted in clarifying the greatest promise for the ideal of an integrated framework, as these last two lenses evidenced the most positive attempts to implement an integrated framework.

### **8.7 Further Research**

Further research should therefore focus on the diversity of practice, in particular in terms of the development of meaningful communities of practice, as recognition of the emergence of strong sub-frameworks, and the bridges that need to be developed between such frameworks. In investigating how such communities naturally develop, conceptualise the work at hand, and enact the purposes of the community, good practice could be extrapolated to an ever widening circle of implementation.

In keeping with the stated and well-supported principle of parity of esteem, inquiries into how the stepsisters of the system, vocational and occupationally based learning could be improved, seems crucial. The placement of academic and vocational/occupational qualifications at the same level does not ensure parity. It seems evident that parity will only be achieved if the quality of vocational/occupationally based learning is seen to be improving.

Finally, research into the emergence of a ‘new epistemology’, with the appropriate mix of theory and practice in keeping with the purposes of qualifications, ‘brokered by new relationships between institutions and workplaces and more diverse delivery modes’ (Blom, Coetzee & Shapiro, 2005, p. 5) and through the development of holistic curricula, learning programmes and assessment regimes which take cognisance of the increasing convergence of education and training, seems important.

### **8.8 Reflections**

This inquiry was a lesson in humility: humility in what policy makers can achieve in their vision for a transformed system. A vision, an ideology and deeply felt passions are not enough to effect large-scale changes in our education and training system.

When I started out on the investigation of the SANQF as an integrated framework, as many of the respondents of the study, I felt equally frustrated by what seemed to be a lack of political will by the two departments responsible for the implementation of the framework, and felt equally betrayed by their indecision, particularly as I work for the organisation that is taking the brunt of the criticism emerging from all levels of the system. However, while the political impasse is constraining the development of innovative approaches to a new system, it became evident to me that other difficulties,

unrelated to the political leadership, have not sufficiently been taken into account. Thus, I found myself vacillating between hope and despair. An integrated framework is such a strong expression of the hope and aspirations of our emerging society and, as a member of that society, I wanted to retain the idealism embodied in a new, equitable society. My despair stemmed from the realisation that idealism needs to be backed up by much hard work, hard thinking and consistent efforts in the face of unexpected barriers, deeply entrenched views and practices and vested interests. Yet, I find myself feeling hopeful again. Firstly, in recognising that perhaps we need to take one step forward, and should be willing to take a few steps back, before moving forward again. Secondly, in experiencing the genuine sincerity with which most people, at all levels and contexts of our education and training system, are trying to grapple with and embody the principles of the SANQF. I therefore remain committed to an education and training system that has as its guiding philosophy the recognition of the value of human beings for whom such a system is set up, wherever they find themselves within the system, and whichever form the system may take in the future.