

SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER MDUDUDZI MANANA ON THE ETDP TVET AND HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

Let me begin by wishing all of you gathered here today a very good day.

The broad guidelines provided to me for the preparation of my presentation today are that this Colloquium aims to address articulation challenges within higher education, occupational and technical and vocational education and training qualifications – and between the sub-frameworks which comprise the national qualifications framework, or NQF.

I will endeavour to fulfill this brief in this short address, but first we need to articulate where we are coming from. According to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, an important part of establishing a coherent and coordinated post-school system is ensuring that there is easy articulation between different parts of the system. The White Paper specifically articulates the need to build a system that facilitates the movement of students both vertically and horizontally between different streams and levels.

In a speech delivered on 15 February 2013, Higher Education and Training Minister, Dr Blade Nzimande said, and I quote: *“A well-articulated system is one in which there are linkages between its different parts; there should be no silos, no dead ends. If a student completes a course at one institution and has gained certain knowledge, this must be recognized by other institutions if the knowledge gained is sufficient to allow epistemological access to programme(s) that they want to enter,”* end of quote.

As evidenced by the above quote, articulation within the education and training system has been one of the key issues that the Minister of Higher Education and Training has sought to address during his term of office. As per the NQF Act of 2008, the Minister has overarching executive responsibility for the NQF, for the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the three quality councils, namely the Council for Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and the Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi).

Flowing from this, articulation within and between the sub-frameworks should be a central building block of an integrated and articulated NQF. We are however keenly aware that despite the objectives of the NQF which clearly indicate the importance of access, redress, transformation and mobility for all learners in South Africa, these objectives have not yet been fully realised.

The Minister, in the preface to the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training, states that, I quote: *“The WP focuses its attention on the vision we have for the system and the principles governing that vision. It represents government’s thinking in the area of higher education and training and is in line with the country’s key national policy documents, including the National Development Plan, the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) and the draft Human resource Development Strategy for SA,”* end of quote. The White Paper is thus explicitly a vision for an integrated system of Post-school education and training (PSET), with all institutions playing their role as parts of a coherent but differentiated whole.

Ensuring articulation of between and within the three sub-frameworks is an important concern for DHET as well as for SAQA and the QCs. SAQA must provide guidance on articulation between the three sub-frameworks and must endeavour to ensure that institutions avoid unfair and irrational barriers to acceptance and credit transfer. All institutions in the post-school system must work together to ensure that there are no dead ends for learners.

Current situation and the need for a Articulation policy

Even though articulation and recognition of prior learning are an integral part of the NQF, both of these central tenets of the NQF apparatus remain at the periphery of NQF implementation processes. This gap is being addressed right now in the DHET through two policies initiatives, that is the development of the RPL Coordination Policy and the Articulation Policy.

It is widely recognized that despite the objectives of the SAQA Act of 1995 and the subsequent NQF Act of 2008, articulation across the post-school system remains poor.

The post-school education and training system is riddled with conceptual and organizational incongruities, in particular:

- Lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications;
- Inadequate response to the varied needs of the current socio-economic context;
- Lack of definition and order in learner progression routes and articulation arrangements;
- Inadequate building of coherence between the NQF sub-frameworks; and
- The absence of robust articulation arrangements between the different programme and institutional types.

To address these incongruities, we need to ensure that education and training must be situated within the framework and value systems of lifelong learning, education for democracy and social justice, including active, innovative participation in the economy. It is suggested that a credible articulation policy and implementation process will facilitate movement of learners between and within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF, between institutions, and also within institutions in order to enable access, progression and mobility.

Trends

Trends that have been identified in education and training suggest that skills needs and socio-economic expectations are changing. This takes place both from the people who are learning and want to create their own jobs or become employed somewhere, and from the workplaces which will employ skilled and knowledgeable graduates.

New and diverse global agendas are emerging. These include the democratization of education and the massification of further and higher education. A consensus seems to be appearing among practitioners and policy makers that education is increasingly being seen as an agent of positive change to address social, economic and political boundaries.

Means and mechanisms to deliver quality education and training solutions within a fast-changing landscape are rapidly changing as well. Significant focus is being placed on the need to develop multiple pathways to facilitate easy movement between different types of education and training; between institutions, from one level to the next level of education; and between education and training and the labour market.

These pathways are increasingly relying on recognition and validation of all forms of learning, including prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer. This serves to ensure learners can access learning, are credited for experiential and prior learning, and can transfer part qualification credits between institutions should the need arise.

The Ministerial Task Team for Recognition of Prior Learning identified the vital role that RPL plays in identifying skills that exist in the workplace, in creating learning pathways where there are gaps, and in distinguishing between an actual 'skills gap' and a 'recognition gap'. They also highlight the importance of the role of RPL in providing alternative routes of access to further and higher education and training programme, and in the promotion and delivery of a national 'returning to learning' strategy for unemployed and under-qualified youth and adult in order to build a learning nation.

A national strategy for wide-scale implementation of Articulation the post-school sector

It is an unfortunate fact that unfair and irrational barriers to access, articulation and credit transfer still exist. The Minister's response to this has been the development of a RPL Coordination policy and an Articulation policy aimed at enabling career and learning pathways to occur seamlessly. The Ministerial Committee for Articulation report underscores the fact that articulation must be seen as a key mechanism in the education and training system of South Africa.

Students and intending students need reasonable assurance that they will be able to take education pathways which recognise previous work and study outcomes, and give appropriate credit where these relate to further studies.

Articulation can be both *systemic* and *specific*, where *systemic* articulation is based on legislation, national policy (such as this articulation policy) and formal requirements within the education and training system. *Specific* articulation (also referred to as articulation in practice) is based on formal and informal agreements within the education and training system, mostly between two or more education and training sub-systems, between specific institutional types, and guided by policies, and accreditation principles. Institutional accommodation of individual needs also falls into the category of *specific articulation*.

Some principles of Articulation

The Articulation policy has been developed and will soon be released for public comment. There are some central articulation principles in this policy which will facilitate movement of learners between and within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF, and between institutions – and also within institutions – in order to enable access, progression and mobility.

I mention a few of the principles:

Principle 1: Establish systemic flexibility: there should be sufficient flexibility to facilitate the migration of learners through different parts of the system so that individuals may have the opportunity to explore their potential and follow their occupational or career pathways unhindered. Such flexibility requires a fully articulated post-school system of education and training.

Principle 2: Address ongoing lifelong learning: Articulation must ensure that there can be simple access to ongoing, lifelong learning to address social, community and labour market needs.

Principle 3: Ensure equity and inclusiveness: Every person should have the right to access and engage in any form of learning suited to his or her personal, economic and community needs, and have his or her learning outcomes made visible and valued.

Principle 4: Address exclusionary practices: Arrangements for articulation should not unfairly advantage or disadvantage either the students entering courses and programmes of study with credit transfer or those students who enter directly without credits for prior learning. The education and training system must be accessible to individuals who are out of work, so that they can have the best possible opportunity to get into work or so that they can engage in productive labour in self-employment opportunities.

Principle 5: Value learning outcomes achieved through different routes equally: The equal value of similar learning outcomes achieved through formal, non-formal and/or informal learning must be promoted. Competences that every individual has accumulated through non-formal and informal learning should be treated on a par with those obtained through formal learning towards the achievement of personal goals.

Principle 6: Parity of esteem as an entrenched principle: Parity of esteem among institutions is the ideal goal in a diverse galaxy of post-school institutions. Promoting parity of esteem requires the ability and commitment to communicate diplomatically, offering constructive suggestions, avoiding dictating of terms, and providing justification where articulation cannot happen.

In conclusion, articulation will be a key mechanism to construct a fully articulated education and training system that resonates with the human development skills required in a democratic society, vibrant communities, in order to address challenges of building a more equitable society and providing all South Africans with the opportunity to grow to their full potential.

For articulation to work across the post-school education and training system there has to be effective articulation at the systemic, programmatic and curricular levels. There will need to be clear steering mechanisms which will include the roles and functions of the stakeholders and role-players, such as DHET, SAQA, CHE, Umalusi, and the QCTO, and the education and training and skills development institutions.

DHET will be responsible for providing the policy framework, policy and guidelines for articulation to occur across the post-school education and training system. SAQA will be

responsible to provide bold overarching leadership to the QCs in terms of articulation processes and practices to ensure that an integrated and articulated education and training system is in place. The QCs will be responsible to work directly with the accredited education and training providers to ensure that these providers have and are implementing fair and credible articulation policies in line with this articulation policy and guidelines

A system is envisaged that is made up of a diverse range of educational institutions and institutional types that will expand considerably over the next years to cater for the millions of people who need its benefits.

It will be a system that must provide paths for articulation between various qualifications, and there should be no dead-ends for students; which means that there should always be a way for someone to improve their qualifications without undue repetition. Its main policy directive is to guide all stakeholders and role-players about articulation to contribute to building a developmental state with a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.

Thank you.

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Issued by Government Communications (GCIS) on behalf of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training

16 March 2016